FAITH of OUR FATHERS

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WALWORTH
CARMAN

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Dorothy Walworth Carman, Author of the Recently Published "Faith of Our Fathers."

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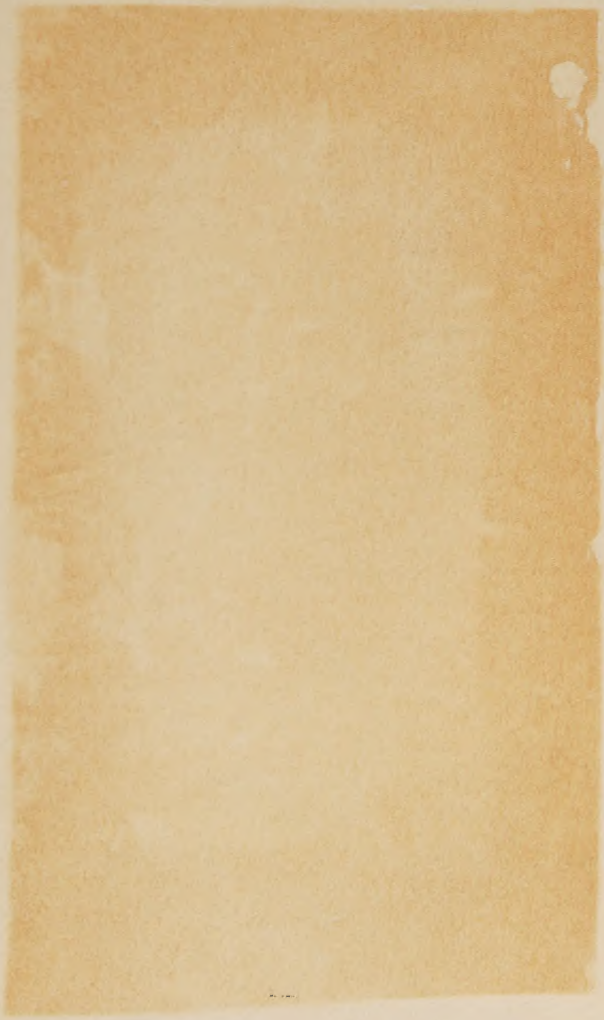

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FAITH OF OUR FATHERS

By DOROTHY WALWORTH CARMAN

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To my father

REVEREND CHARLES LORENZO WALWORTH

Soldier of the Church Militant
who kept the faith
and
To my mother
who made the yoke easy and the
burden light

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FAITH OF OUR FATHERS

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CHAPTER I

In the year eighteen hundred and seventy-eight, Hugh Wesley Bloom stood, with his hands in his tight breeches pockets, staring seriously at a large steel engraving hung above the mantelpiece of the parsonage sitting room. His breeches were tight because they had descended to him from the maturing legs of his brother John, and had arrived at him a little too late. As the eleven-year-old son of a Methodist minister, Hugh was entirely accustomed to inheriting his clothes. So he never wasted a thought on his breeches. He drove his knuckles deeper into his pockets, causing an ominous gaping at all his seams. He was studying secretly, for the nine hundred and sixteenth time, the steel engraving with the title, "Martin Luther Burning the Papal Bull."

"Now I see Luther and the bonfire," he said to himself, earnestly, "but I can't find the Bull. There ought to be his horns or his tail sticking out somewhere."

Hugh would not dream of asking any of his

nine brothers and sisters about Luther's puzzling victim. Luke and John and Agatha were too old and lofty, and the younger ones, Hugh felt, were far too immature to be questioned. He had once seen Dorcas burning her doll on a pyre behind the barn, but, upon investigation, he had discovered that her doll was not impersonating the Papal Bull but a Christian martyr.

Dorcas and Mary and Martha liked to play Christian martyrs best. Sometimes, when they were especially pleased with Hugh and Matthew and Mark, they would let them be lions and devour the martyrs in the arena. Sometimes they bound gingham loin cloths about their dolls' careworn and unabashed middles, and played cannibal and missionary.

This afternoon the girls were mad with Hugh, and were amusing themselves fatuously under the sycamore. Through the window Hugh could see Agatha sewing ruffles on a doll's dress, and Dorcas peering into the top of a doll's head with grewsome composure. The other boys of the family were playing baseball. Father had gone to town in the buggy. Mother was washing the twins, Mary and Martha, in the woodshed. Hugh could tell that by the shrieks and the thumping. Tonight was prayer meeting night and he knew

within his prophetic soul that the whole ten of them would have to be washed. Mother had captured the twins early. He wished there were somebody to play with.

His eyes wandered speculatively about the sitting room and fell upon the monstrous edition of Doré's *Pictures of the Bible,* which was always kept under the center table. Joyously Hugh knelt down and, with a grunt, opened the mighty volume to the picture of the bears devouring the children who mocked the Apostle. The Bloom children loved gory pictures, like this one, best. The Paradise section of Doré was almost virginal in appearance, while the Hell section was frayed and spotted. The parents of this bloody-minded family did not realize what carnal enjoyment their curly-headed offspring derived from gloating over the naked devils. They always studied a scene minutely, and then acted it out as fully as opportunity and decency allowed. Hugh was planning to dramatize "The Children and the Apostle" to-morrow. He vowed he would be the biggest bear. He knew that Luke, the eldest, would succeed in being the Apostle. Luke was always God when they played Garden of Eden, and the corpse when a funeral was acted, and, in spite of his sex, the bride at all weddings.

At this point in Hugh's reflections the clock on the mantelpiece beneath the engraving struck five with a shrill violence that joggled the fringe of little, brown balls on the mantelpiece cover. Hugh admired those little balls and he was very proud of everything else in the room also. On one side of the vociferous clock, under a glass dome, was a small ship, done in glass, with green waves, and wee, red lights on her bow and stern, and glass spars so slender that they seemed ready to snap any minute. On the other side of the clock, under a similar dome, was a glass "Descent from the Cross," with brown glass thorns and the cunningest red nailprints you ever did see. Over in the corner of the room was the household organ upon which Agatha performed, but whose respiration Hugh could never control. Above the organ was a dusty bouquet of peacock's feathers, which had belonged to the family peacock, Jezebel. Against the opposite wall was a long, horsehair sofa, whose hairs were loosened and curly, so that it was not safe to sit upon it in your underwear. On the center table was a lamp whose round shade was lumpy with different colored stones. Hugh considered them very precious and thought of the lamp whenever anyone mentioned the jeweled Gates of Heaven.

Beside this invaluable lamp there always lay a copy of the periodical published by the Woman's Foreign Missionary Society. It was called *The Heathen Woman's Friend,* and Hugh always wondered why his mother took such a thing when she was not a heathen. Hugh also wondered why anyone should ever want a prettier sitting room than this, and why Agatha said that Doctor Sloan's parlor, with the gold chairs, was so much better.

Just then Hugh heard a thundering roar on the front porch. The front door crashed open and in trooped the hot Bloom disciples, John bouncing a baseball against the ceiling, six-year-old Mark tugging at his stockings, and tiny Peter, rosy under the weight of a bat.

"O looka Hugh!" Luke shouted, "he's got Dorry all by himself. Whatcha lookin' at anyway?"

Hugh was forced to yield the object of his contemplations. He knew that one cannot see very much either over, under, or between a mass of agitated backs and legs, so he did not try to see any longer but went over to the window and was rewarded by the first glimpse of his father's buggy. To be exact, he first saw the gray ears and nose of the family horse bob over the top of

the hill. Soon with a war cry the boys were all at the gate where they were joined by the slightly pacific Agatha and Dorcas.

"Now boys," father called as he came close, "to your chores! And I guess your mother will be wanting you girls in the kitchen." Balaam, the horse, stood still before the gate and sneezed, wetting his welcomers. His passenger clambered down a little wearily, reached in and took a big black bag from beneath the seat, and disappeared in the house. Agatha and Dorcas followed immediately, drawn by the sight of that bag, and even the boys were too excited over it to have their usual fight over who should lead Balaam. Hugh seized the unoccupied bridle and was halfway to the barn before Luke and John awoke to the situation. The procession halted at the pump, where Mark, after agitated priming, splashed a pailful of water before Balaam's expectant nose. Matthew unhitched, John forked hay into the manger, and Luke was left the woodpile.

In the kitchen Agatha and Dorcas were bearing things from kitchen to dining room in ceaseless procession. They made their labor bearable by pretending they were setting the table for the Last Supper. But they hardly dared breathe

this pretense, even to themselves, because they were afraid that any moment a Just God might take them by the pinafores and cast them into the Lake of Fire. Mary and Martha, to whom the light task of laying the napkins had been assigned, were waxing argumentative.

"No, I don't haf to do anything, 'cause I'm Mary," one half of the twins announced, "and you haf to do everything, 'cause you're Martha. The Bible says so."

"I do not! It does not!" the other half retorted, feeling the odds were against her.

"Mary didn't do anything but sit down, and God stuck up for her," Mary replied, rashly.

This was the harassed Martha's opportunity.

"God!" she sneered. "It wasn't God. It was Jesus."

"It was not. It was God!"

"Jesus!"

"God!"

"Jesus!"

"God!"

Their voices, which had been discreet, were now raised in controversial abandon to exceed even the activities of Agatha and Dorcas. At this point the earthly father of Mary and Martha strode into the dining room and surveyed them

as they shrieked the first two names of the Trinity, Mary brandishing the napkins of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, while Martha waved the rest, including Peter's bib.

"Mary and Martha!" their father said, sternly.

The napkins halted. Mary and Martha could not have been more scared if it had been their Heavenly Father.

"Yes, sir," they said, holding the napkins in a cluster over their palpitating stomachs.

"How is it, children, that I hear you pronouncing these holy names?"

"Oh, father," the glib Mary replied, "we were talking about our Sunday School lesson and I said that God was the one that talked to Mary and Martha, and Martha said it was Jesus. It was God, wasn't it, father? Make it be God!"

"You are both right," the Oracle answered, smiling, "Jesus was God, so Jesus' word was God's word, also." He continued into the kitchen, colliding with the butter and Agatha, unaware that he left behind him united theological dismay.

"Jesus *was* God!" hissed Martha. "But—I always thought Jesus was the *Son* of God!"

"Never you mind," Mary said, philosophically, as she laid her father's napkin carefully

so the little owl on the ring would show. She was born only five minutes earlier than Martha, but she always seemed much wiser. "You and I will have to keep still and find out all we can. How can we expect to keep all God's relatives straight at our age?"

By the time supper was ready, Luke had stumbled in with an armful of wood and crashed it into the box by the stove. The other boys were full of tales about how Balaam had taken to his supper and eaten his oats first. After various last-minute scurryings for spoons and several false starts, the Bloom family at last sat down at the table and there was a long blessing, during which not one of the children would have dared to open his eyes. They would as soon have dared to jump off the barn roof. Their father always said grace at supper, but for breakfast and dinner the older children took turns. The member on whom the weighty honor of the blessing was conferred always felt an almost unbearable responsibility about sanctifying the food. The children all felt that food improperly blessed was apt to be poisonous. While they ate their porridge in great, dripping spoonfuls, they discussed the baseball game from every angle. There was no mention of the big, black bag that

had come in the surrey, but the children knew questions about that were useless until to-morrow morning. After the porridge was over, and bowls were scraped dry and shiny, father, unanimously urged, told a thrilling tale about the revolutionary Israel Putnam, who had been let into a wolf's den at the end of a rope and been jerked out at the last possible moment. The children were as excited over this story as if they had never heard it before. When the Reverend Bloom dramatically described the two wolf's eyes blazing in the darkness, little Peter's feelings became too much for him. He sobbed into his pinafore and had to be borne from the table. Peter, at the manly age of five, was still wearing pinafores on account of his proximity to Mary and Martha. Hugh had never forgotten his own virile joy when, at six years old, he definitely emerged from Agatha's petticoats.

Peter's departure was the end of supper. The girls washed the dishes while the boys performed frantic ablutions. This was prayer meeting night and they all had to be especially clean. Father went to his study to prepare, and mother ran over to see Mrs. Schatz's new baby, and took jelly. Then the boys had to bring up the surrey and hitch the irreligious Balaam, who much pre-

ferred his hay and cursed with his tail. Agatha, *in loco parentis,* added little touches of respectability all around. She jerked down the girls' skirts and set the boys' hats on the backs of their heads. When they were all ready, they sat in a row on the horseblock and waited for father and mother to come and climb into the front seat of the surrey.

During the journey, Matthew and Mark sat in the coveted furthest back seat, with their legs dangling. These two beguiled the first mile of the way by stoning Jacob, the dog, who patted after them, undiscouraged. Every week somebody had the fun of stoning Jacob, but he must have possessed an early Christian endurance, for he was undeterred. The stones gave out after the half mile and Balaam went too fast to allow for getting any more. After three miles the graveyard monuments were in sight, and, right after them, the white frame church with its triangular steeple. Then they heard the church bell, and Jacob put his nose between his forepaws and howled—hesitated—then turned and galumphed homeward—soon a diminishing, distant, yellow spot. Jacob's parents, age, and former occupation were unknown. Jacob's ears were small, pendulous pancakes, and his face was

long and thoughtful. He had the meek, yet wary countenance of a church treasurer. The Samaritan Blooms had found him by the roadside, after he had been run over, and had fed and collared him ever since. John had saved up his money and bought him a collar with spikes all around, as if he were a dog of great spirit. But Jacob would not fight even his own fleas, and he was very much afraid of the church bell.

Hugh, sandwiched between John and Dorcas, did not see Jacob's flight. He was thinking of the graves they were passing, and wondering why they were put so near the church, as if the church were a sort of grave itself. When he sat on Sundays in the Pastor's Pew, he could see the tops of the tallest monuments. He often wished he could see from his pew little Rebecca's grave with the cute, carved lamb on top of it. Rebecca was the very youngest, and she had died with measles. Hugh felt that he could have spared Dorcas better.

Father went up to the pulpit and began to turn the leaves of the Bible to find the Scripture Lesson. Mother went into the pew first, with Peter next, and the boys followed in apostolic succession. The girls sat in the pew ahead. It was a large meeting for that church—twenty.

Almost everybody testified, and the minister's children said their usual verses of Scripture, when nudged. Peter, as the youngest, was allowed to say the shortest verse in the Bible, "Jesus wept," which always sounded like "Jesus swept." Mary chose the next shortest verse, "God is love," while Martha followed with her acknowledged favorite of the whole Bible, "There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth." Hugh gave his customary, "A good name is rather to be chosen than many riches, and loving kindness than fine gold." He thought a "good name" meant a nice, pretty name like Hugh. He knew a boy called Ephraim whom he pitied with all his heart. When Mrs. Simpson arose to tell, as usual, how prayer had saved Mr. Simpson from drink, Hugh waxed sleepier and sleepier. After Mrs. Simpson, he roused himself for a hymn which he enjoyed because it contained the picturesque passage, "gladly the cross I'd bear." Hugh visualized a cross-eyed bear, and the vision helped him through another fifteen minutes. Then father was addressing the meeting and Hugh saw Mary and Martha clash elbows when father mentioned "Jesus, the Son of God." He wondered vaguely why they looked so worried, and then tobogganed into a sleep

where the winking gasoline lamps around the wall and the red carpet and the red hassocks whirled for a moment, and then shot into darkness.

At last the prayers were over. The farmers' wives had tightened their bonnets and asked one another about their children. The farmers had inquired about their mutual hogs and slyly put back into their mouths the tobacco which had been put into their coat pockets during the meeting from a sense of fitness. The bushy sexton had turned off the last lamp and been told by the chairman of the House and Grounds Committee, who was a successful sheep breeder, that the nickel reflectors needed polishing. As usual, father had to reassure Miss Mabel Jones, who was always afraid she had committed the Unpardonable Sin, so the minister's family were the last to leave, and found it difficult to rouse Balaam, who looked indignantly around his blinders, and planted his feet firmly, and stretched for five minutes. The way home was beguiled by minor fights among various pairs of children, and the whole body of them fell over the sleeping form of Jacob, on the parsonage threshold, who had nothing of the watchdog in his make-up and only twitched his ears. Every-

body went out into the kitchen for a drink, and, when the dipper was passing from one noisy mouth to another, mother said, sharply, "Where's Hugh?"

"Why, where *is* Hugh?" father asked, counting the family again.

A great cry was raised for Hugh. The barn was searched. Even the hencoop was invaded by a lantern, but its flash revealed nothing but serried rows of scaly, roosting legs. The awakened Jacob flopped about the yard, barking, his ears lifting and rebounding. Finally it was discovered that no one had seen Hugh since prayer meeting.

"Oh, poor little Hugh!" mother said. "We have left him in church! He will be so scared!"

So the ninety-and-nine were left in the parsonage, and the now frankly rebellious Balaam was again hitched to the wagon, and the parents started out to find the one sheep that was lost. Father could have gone alone, but mother could not wait to know that Hugh was safe. It was a quiet May night and the stars hung from the sky like so many lanterns from the backs of angels' buggies. The mother sat tense and upright, trying not to imagine how frightened Hugh would be when he found himself alone

in the dark church. The father said nothing, but chirruped often to Balaam, who fell asleep as he walked and who once looked back with an air of such forbearance that no one but an anxious parent would have had the heart to urge him. After a long time riding, they saw the misty churchyard, and soon they stopped before the church. The mother expected to hear some one pounding on the panels, but there was no sound. The Reverend Daniel Bloom lifted the lantern down and his wife held it up while he fitted the key into the lock. It turned with a shriek. A great rush of blackness as the door opened inward. Down the middle aisle the two sped, the lantern sending broken blades of light upon red carpeting and yellow oak pews. They reached the seat next to the front and Daniel held the lantern high so that the light poured over the pew. And there in the corner was that which was lost —still fast asleep—his brown head down upon his blue blouse. With a happy rush his mother reached him and put her arms around him. Hugh awoke to see his mother's face over him and the lantern haloing her head. He sighed luxuriously.

"Is the meeting over yet?" he said.

CHAPTER II

Hugh wakened early the next morning to hear the irritated crowing of Ananias. He knew by this that John was already gathering eggs. Then he listened for that other sound which he had never wakened too early to hear—the even click of his father's hoe in the garden which raised vegetables with a violent border of nasturtiums. Hugh knew that the parent hoe was clicking commandingly for the younger hoes of Matthew and Mark. Hugh's own part to-day was to feed Noah, the drake, and his wife and sons, while Luke tended the geese and the cow and Balaam. As his costume consisted of but two articles, Hugh was soon racing from the woodshed with a dishful of duck nourishment. He expected to find Noah's family confidently anticipatory by the wire of their pen. But he found them in highly unsteady column formation, quacking and looking from one to the other for all the world like a lot of presiding elders. Hugh soon saw the trouble. Noah and Mrs. Noah were there, and Ham, and Japhet, but Shem

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was gone. Beautiful Shem—the flower of the flock! He of the snow-white stomach and the raven tail! He who suffered himself to be scratched on the throat and who had yielded up his best tail feather for Dorcas's doll without a quack! Tears swam in Hugh's eyes and he ran back toward the house, still carrying Noah's breakfast, to tell the family that a hawk had carried off Shem. It would have been better had the hawk chosen the homely Ham or the greedy Japhet. He met John with a pail of warm eggs and gasped out his grief.

"Oh, Shem," John said, "Father killed him before breakfast. We're going to have a big dinner to-day 'count of the graduation."

Hugh slowly turned back with the breakfast. There was no resentment in him. His sense of justice made him admit that Shem was the chattel of his father, since Mrs. Noah had set on Shem and father had bought Mrs. Noah at the market. Father had a perfect right to eat Shem. But why had Shem been especially chosen for sacrifice? Couldn't his father see that he was the best of the ducks? He wished that he could have given Shem one last satisfying scratch. He remembered that he had driven Shem off at supper last night when he seemed to be devouring

the just portion of Ham. If he had only known of the execution, Ham would have gone to roost supperless.

Noah, by this time, had poked his head through the wire of his pen and nearly strangled himself. He had seen breakfast carried off under his very bill and he was sorely tried. Shem or no Shem, he was hungry. The rest of the bereaved relatives felt the same way, for they crowded around the dish, wing against wing, with snapping yellow bills and jerking tails. They seemed almost to relish the fact that there was all the more for them.

"People are always sorry when each other dies. They aren't like ducks," Hugh thought, watching their bills lift regularly. But he could not help admiring the pious way they thanked God for every mouthful. His father had told him that the ducks were asking a blessing on their food when they pointed their bills to heaven as they swallowed. Hugh was not given the scientific explanation that ducks have to elevate their heads in order that food may properly pass down their gullets. So he continued to wonder why the ducks, who were so unfeeling about Shem, should be so painstaking about their blessings.

When he passed through the woodshed on the way to his own breakfast, he saw a little heap of white feathers in a basket. He might have known that none of Shem would be wasted. His feathers would be a pillow for Peter, because Peter had lately said his pillow leaked.

In the dining room Hugh found a tense air of festival. Everybody was in his ordinary clothes but somehow exaggeratedly washed. Bright-eyed mother, with an even hand, dished the oatmeal, and no one argued over his amount. Dorcas had been out to the pasture early and rifled a wild cherry tree of a single crooked bough, which now spread in the center of the table like a seven-branched candlestick. The white earthen water pitcher had been the only thing large enough for it. After the oatmeal was over and the pancakes came, mother smiled at Agatha, who went out into the kitchen and returned, preceded by a strong odor. Coffee! The sturdy smell of it made Hugh forget Shem completely. Hugh was used to coffee only on Sundays, and even then the tint of his cup was a faint beige, a shade which deepened gradually in the cups of John and Luke until in his father's great mustache cup it was a glorious black. The mustache cup had been a gift to father from the

children and it represented a vast amount of hoarding. Daniel Bloom had realized the importance of this gift and used it Sundays only. That it was employed this morning augmented the occasion's grandeur. As Hugh took his coffee, sloshing each spoonful around in his mouth before swallowing, to make it last longer, he felt almost sacrilegious to be drinking coffee on a week day. He happened to look at John's legs and saw that he had gone upstairs before breakfast and put on his long trousers. Luke had graduated to long trousers all the time, but John could wear them Sundays only until he had worn out his short pairs or foisted them on Hugh. The youthful freshness of his two short pairs was agonizing to John. After weeks of as hard wear as possible, they had not even gotten to patching.

After the coffee, and morning prayers, the family paraded into the sitting room, which was the schoolroom every week-day morning. Mrs. Bloom gave the younger children their lessons until they graduated to their father, who taught them Latin and Greek. The scholars always sat in a half-circle, with pencils and a lot of old wrapping paper for scratch work. Nobody must put a thing down on the expensive white paper until he was sure of it. As the nearest schoolhouse

was fifteen miles away, this was the only chance the Blooms had for an education. The youngest members of this school were Mary and Martha and Mark, who had just entered the labyrinths of the multiplication table. Hugh thought that the multiplication table, especially the "eights" and "nines," was a regular Old Man of the Sea for taking on terrifying shapes. But after you once knew it, it seemed as right as the Ten Commandments for six times six to be thirty-six. Hugh had learned to "add" and "carry" while weeding the nasturtiums, and for him, ever after, a column of figures recalled the smell of the garden dirt, and the open faces of the vermilion nasturtiums, with their young leaves like thin, green pennies. Father had weeded the beets and carrots, close by, and listened to Hugh's answers. Learning arithmetic that way made it such a solid part of life. But one had to learn things on a chair in the sitting room, too.

This morning the Reverend and Mrs. Bloom sat, one on either side of the center table, with the big, black bag between them, while the children assumed the usual semi-circle at a safe distance. Peter, who was too young to belong, and who was devoured with jealousy, sat just outside

the door with Elijah in his arms, and amused himself by making faces at the elect. In particularly envious moments, when some pupil did nobly, he pulled Elijah's tail. The tails of Elijah, and Elisha, her kitten, were long, and bare at the ends.

Luke was the first to be questioned. He was fifteen, and he had passed through Cæsar, and the Anabasis, also, and was ready to invade Cicero and Homer with confidence and self-possession. But first he must prove his worthiness. First he must name Cæsar's generals. That was easy, since he had named his flock of geese after them. He also knew about Cæsar's campaigns and could describe the construction of the bridge. Then the inquisition turned to the Anabasis, and, when Cyrus and the parasangs had been satisfactorily settled, the teacher bent down and opened the magic bag, twenty eyes and ten mouths opening simultaneously. Out he drew, as a conjurer draws a rabbit, a baseball glove, and ball, and bat, and handed them to Luke with the words, "Well done, my son. You have been faithful in little things. May you be faithful in greater things." His mother went over and kissed Luke, and there was a loud expression of pain from Elijah. Luke whooped and batted

the ball into the bunch of peacock feathers above the organ, and then was silent from excess of joy. All his peers tried on the glove and fondled the satin surface of the bat, humbly.

And now all attention was turned to John, who to-day completed the Greek and Latin verb, an educational stage which was considered very special. John was questioned narrowly. The regular conjugations came trippingly from his tongue, although he was inclined to put a strong, rhythmic accent on the last syllable of the verb, and had to be halted. He slackened speed in the irregular verbs and, once or twice during Principal Parts, stopped for signals. But, on the whole, his was a praiseworthy performance, if the frequent remarks from Elijah could be considered a criterion. Then Daniel Bloom reached down into the bag again and drew forth a gold watch, shining as one of the seals of Heaven. Luke had received such a watch a year ago, and the other children would, in their turn, be blessed. They all knew that they would get gold watches when they completed the classic verb, so they could hardly complete it fast enough. On seeing this reward so near, and yet so far, every bosom was freshly stirred. Hugh looked from one to another of his kinsmen's faces

and saw an emulative fire. Only Hugh's mother did not look so happy as the rest. Father looked proud, but mother only rather patient, as she sat with her Paisley shawl strained tight about her shoulders, and her little, loose hands folded in her lap. Mother was hoping that these prizes would help to make the children always remember home as the happiest and most appreciative of places. But Hugh did not imagine that his mother was thinking this. He thought only, with a pang, that she had no watch. She was forever pleasing Luke by asking him the time. Now she would have to please John.

Agatha had not reached any definite scholastic stage, so the searchlight was next focused on Hugh. He was supposed to be through with his mother's elementary school and be ready for the classic grammar. Tremblingly he parsed and diagrammed and drew a picture of the inner ear and gave the causes of the Mexican War. Then the questions stopped and his father leaned down. Hugh could hardly breathe. There was a great pain in his throat. He had always longed to know Latin and Greek—those languages that sounded like Italian fruit men and that told about heroes. He yearned to read about gods and golden apples and giants.

This longing burst inside him, at that moment, like an explosion. And then he came to himself, with a great shout, for at his feet appeared a pair of new shoes with glittering copper toes—real copper—he leaned over and felt it—hard and shiny. Perhaps, when he wore these on the street, some one would think they were gold toes. He gave his father and mother one glowing look and unlaced his old shoes and put the new beauties on.

"Why, father—why, father," he exulted, his voice cracking with wonder. "They fit! They fit! You—you didn't get them large for me to grow into!"

He paraded before the semi-circle, permitting his toes to be touched by the less fortunate, and allowing Elijah to blunt her rampant nails vainly against them. Jacob, who had been asleep under the organ, bristled and barked.

Hugh's prize was the last one bestowed. School, now, was over for the summer, and the family separated for special duties. Hugh was allowed to wear his golden shoes for the day, only. After this day, they were for occasions. So he stepped consciously about his chores and stopped every other minute to pat and polish the metal, looking at his shoes from every angle,

and even standing on his head for an especially grand effect. Once he took his shoes off and put them in the sun and walked around a corner, and then walked back fast, trying to come upon his own shoes suddenly and astonish himself. After his chores were done, he crept upstairs softly and stood on a chair before his mother's mirror and waved either leg in the air, alternately. Presents were rare and overwhelming things in the Bloom family, and Hugh usually wore clothes which he had seen for years on John. Hugh also peeped into the Latin Grammar on his mother's secretary and saw that the first word he would learn was "stella," meaning "star." While he was wondering what accusative and dative meant, he heard the dinner bell, and caromed downstairs—in what he imagined was a blaze of light, streaming from his shoes.

At the door of the dining room, he remembered Shem, with a horrible rush. For there Shem was—at the head of the table—cooked—and very well done. His neck was curled down sadly, and dressing was oozing from his beloved stomach, causing bursts of unfeeling mirth from Mary and Martha. As his father carved, Hugh maintained a proper composure only by feeling of his shoes. Hugh had hardly ever known what

any part of a bird tasted like but the neck. The good dark meat went to the older ones, and the white meat went to Peter and the twins, because they were young. But he felt that he could not bear to eat Shem's neck, which had so often been extended for him to scratch. So he finally said, desperately, "Father—please don't give me Shem's neck!" And then, at his father's gentle glance of inquiry, he lost control and loosed the regretful howl, "Oh, father—why didn't you kill Vercingetorix? Luke wouldn't have missed him!"

Hugh was comforted with assurances that no one had dreamed of the tie between him and Shem, and a decent respect was shown his scruples regarding the neck. He was served with the liver as being the least suggestive section. Hugh hesitated, sighed, poked with his fork, finally tasted.

There was no doubt about it. Shem was delicious.

CHAPTER III

MINISTERS' studies look tired at four o'clock in the morning. Books that are constantly used acquire a fatigued appearance, and piles of thumbed manuscript get circles under their eyes. Moreover, the Parsonage Committee always decrees that the coldest, darkest, smallest room in the house shall be the study, and woe to the wife who changes the furniture and puts the study elsewhere. How the Parsonage Committee can expect the Holy Ghost and a Pentecostal tongue to descend upon a minister in a stuffy cell, six by eight, with a carpet that has a bilious attack, is one of God's own mysteries which we may expect to see solved the other side of the veil. Perhaps on the Judgment Day the virtuous Chairman of the Parsonage Committee, who is expecting Heaven on the grounds that he paid his butcher on the first of every month, will stand before God and be asked, "Why did you stifle Me in a rathole?"

And then the Chairman will cough and shift

his feet and say, "Please, Lord, when did I ever stifle You in a rathole?"

"When you put Daniel Bloom into that six-by-eight study!"

"Please, Lord, it was the only place for him. He had to put his ten children in the two larger rooms."

"Why didn't you build a decent parsonage?"

"Please, Lord, we couldn't afford it. We had to help support the elder and the bishop, and that took our extra money."

"What? A ragged little church like you had to help support the elder and the bishop?"

"Yes, Lord, and if we raised the minister's salary, we had to pay more to the elder and the bishop, so we never raised the minister."

Then God will summon the tallest angel with the gold trumpet and say, "Call the elders and the bishops. It's a rotten system." And the tallest angel will put his trumpet to his lips in a beautiful horizontal position, and puff out his celestial cheeks and go through the shining streets, blowing, and he will be gone a long time. The Chairman will get very tired standing and waiting, and begin to look like a drowned mouse, and the seraphs will begin to think of lunch. Then the tallest angel will come back and say, "Your

Honor—I find only two elders here and no bishops."

Daniel Boone Bloom's study looked more tired than ever this rainy April morning because he had been up late in it the night before, settling his accounts. For to-day he was setting off to the Annual Methodist Conference. It was a year after Shem's death and Hugh was making remarkable inroads on the Latin and Greek verb. It had been a year of achievement in the parish. Daniel Bloom's report to the Conference, which he had made out so eagerly and carefully and proudly, showed a record of two hundred and twelve calls—made to farmhouses miles apart—twenty-five babies baptized, seventeen persons received into full membership after six months of religious teaching in the pastor's class, eleven received on preparatory membership, four weddings, and six funerals. He did not note down the five hundred and eleven prayers he had made for the discouraged, nor the six hundred and nineteen hours of counsel to the bewildered. Of the two hundred and twelve calls, fifty-one had been made on the sick. Hugh usually went with his father on the sick calls because he had a sweet soprano voice, and the sick liked to hear him sing the old hymns at their bedsides, espe-

cially the one, "I will fly to the rock, to the rock let me fly, to the rock that is higher than I."

Daniel was the fourteenth child of a pioneer and was given a pioneer's name, Daniel Boone. Daniel's father's name was Hugh, and this name was bestowed on the baby child who resembled his grandfather so strikingly at birth. Daniel's family had migrated to Ohio in a prairie schooner and Daniel worked his way through Oberlin College. Before the Civil War his idealistic heart was with the negroes, and his college room was one of the stations of the Underground Railroad.

After Oberlin, he attended Union Theological Seminary and met Worthy Sheffield, a slight, shy girl, something like one of the minute flowers you find in early April woods, if you brush away the brown leaves and look hard. She had been reared in a house where Foreign Missions was always mentioned in the same sentence with God. Her family considered missions far more important than abolition. She was sent to a female seminary in the same city with Daniel's seminary, where she became so noted for the sanctificational and inspirational quality of her prayers that one night Daniel Bloom attended one of the female seminary's open prayer meetings out of curiosity to see this special female. The prayer

room was dimly lighted with candles, and when Worthy rose to pray, as straight and slim as any of the candles, Daniel felt a tremendous thrill. He felt he had found God, although he never listened to her prayer at all, but sat with his eyes open, staring at her hair, and the great amber comb peering over the top of her head.

Daniel was not the one to let God escape from him, so he married Worthy Ruth Sheffield. Her family at first were bitterly disappointed that he was not a missionary going to the foreign field, but was lingering among the fleshpots of the New York East Conference. However, when his first appointment was in the rocky wilderness of New York State, Worthy's family began to feel there might be something noble about Home Missions. Daniel was a little dashed that he should be sent to such a small parish, with all his fire and his education. Daniel did not know that if Jesus Himself came to earth incognito He would be sent to some Rocktown, or, if He appeared in acknowledged person, He would never rise any higher than Chairman of the Board of Examiners. Daniel smiled and said Rocktown was only the beginning. But Rocktown had been followed by Nebraska Center, and Nebraska

Center by Dunnville, and Dunnville by his present charge—Estey's Corners.

His failure to rise only bewildered, but did not anger, Daniel. He had a faith in God's will and bishops that would not shrink. He did not know that he had been marked out from the first for country charges. He had that mild, gentle face and that evenness of temper which bishops think harmonize with rural scenery. He was so trusting and respectful that bishops felt an irresistible impulse to impose upon him. If he had only told one or two slightly discolored stories, he would have risen in time. If he had only been able to slap people on the back, he would have been entrusted with a city pastorate at once. If he had only discarded his dignified old frock coat, patched with prayers and strong cotton, and worn to Conference, instead, a sack suit with a red tie, God would instantly have called him to fields of larger usefulness. But this misguided minister took religion so seriously and made such a virtue of modesty, that it was preposterous to think that he could get anywhere.

However, during the past two years, Daniel had begun to think that perhaps God's will sometimes gets twisted in the hands of those who

call themselves His humble instruments, and that it might actually be God's will for him to be Presiding Elder of this country district whose churches he had served all his life. Balaam knew the hills of the district by heart, and Daniel knew the people. He was sure he could persuade enough money from them to please the Conference. The ministers in the near-by pulpits had told Daniel that he ought to be Presiding Elder, and the present Elder, who was longing for new pastures very different from these cow pastures, also spoke "not unfavorably of such an eventuality."

A hopeful Daniel, therefore, came into the study this early morning. He wore his frock coat because he would leave by the milk train in an hour. Outside the splashed window he could hear the cries of those who roused Balaam, mingled with the rapping of the rain on the window glass and the April east wind banging a blind downstairs. He sat down before his desk and began to roll up some papers preparatory to putting a big rubber band about them. As he held the band stretched in his left hand, Worthy knocked at the door and came in immediately. She had left the waffles, for once, under the supervision of delighted Agatha. Her

hair was in an early-morning knot, and she wore a long, gray wrapper, and her face had the lined look that comes to a woman on a rainy morning, when her dearest is going off—on a milk train—for better, for worse—for richer, for poorer. But her eyes were very bright, as if they still reflected those candles in the seminary prayer room. Ten children and four parishes had never taken away their shine. As for the children, she and Daniel had taken them as hostages from Heaven. They believed absolutely that the Lord knew best how many to send to parents, even if they were getting only eight hundred dollars a year. If the Lord had sent twenty children, Daniel still would have continued to preach the gospel.

Worthy came over to the desk and put her hands on Daniel's head.

"I know you will come back with the Elder's appointment, dear," she said. "Surely it isn't too much to ask of the Lord for you. I have prayed night and morning for two years."

Daniel looked up with a young smile. His voice was gay.

"I hope so, Worthy," he answered. "I don't see why I shouldn't have it. My brother ministers want me, and you know Elder Gobbler

spoke encouragingly when he was here to dinner the last time, when the mince pie was so good. I have worked up to the place. I know the District. If I should get the place—I know I ought to think of the greater work I could do for God, but I hope it isn't wrong that I think of the better house for you, Worthy, and more money for the children. I really didn't think we would be able to get that gold watch for John last year, and we wouldn't have if you hadn't turned your dress again and I hadn't decided to make this old coat do another season. It's a good coat still," he continued, fingering his lapel, "and it has given me good service. But if I should get to be Presiding Elder, I would get a new one. You don't think it is wrong I should think of that, do you, Worthy?"

"Wrong, Daniel!" she cried, reproachfully, "It's right! Doesn't the Bible speak about the garments of the angels? Oh, I keep saying over and over to myself, whenever I begin to be worried, 'He will give thee the desire of thine heart. Trust also in Him, and He will bring it to pass.'"

She stood for a moment, clasping his head in her arms. Daniel looked up at her as one of

her children might, and she smiled down at him as she might have smiled at Peter.

"Waffles, Daniel!" she said, and laughed. "Waffles, especially for you!"

"Waffles, Worthy!" he exclaimed, imitating her important tone, "especially for me! If I eat enough of them I won't have to spend any money for lunch!"

"When you are Presiding Elder," Worthy said, "we will have them every morning."

The children did not know of this prelude to the bright breakfast, where father ate more waffles than anybody. The children never knew the parental heartaches. For all they saw, father had everything he wished. Luke brought Balaam to the door, and even Balaam threw back his head and sniffed loudly, as if he were a Presiding Elder's horse. Father kissed them all around twice and patted Jacob on the head, who was in such agony at parting that he stood on two legs. As the wagon drove off, Peter cried and had to be carried off to see the pigs, Jeroboam and Rheaboam, for comfort. But Hugh, who stayed behind, saw that his mother watched his father out of sight, her hand lifted above her head, but still, and not waving.

The day cleared about nine o'clock, and Hugh,

who had been left with the proud responsibility of the garden, hoed so hard all the morning that the very vegetables were in danger of their lives. He resolved that not one spear of weed should show when father came back. But after dinner he felt somewhat sick of the sight of a vegetable, and so he took his bow and arrow and played solitary Indian chief. The Bloom family considered it good morals to play Indians, because Indians had existed and were true. It was wrong to play fairies, because fairies were untrue. Novels were wicked because they told lies. That was why the children played stories from the Bible so much. They knew that every word in the Bible was true, and, besides, they had little other material for their imagination. The children were allowed to read *Uncle Tom's Cabin* because father believed that was true. Mary and Martha, on a trip to the nearest big town, had once seen a parade advertising a play of "Uncle Tom's Cabin" in the local theater. Although they knew a person who went inside a theater would go to Hell, all the brimstone in the universe could not have kept Mary and Martha from looking at the parade. The affecting sight of little Eva, borne aloft in a chair, so high that they could see the lace on her

drawers, with a very pale face and flowing ringlets and white stockings, pained the simple souls of Mary and Martha so that they could not sleep for two nights afterward.

Beside *Uncle Tom's Cabin,* Hugh had read one novel in his life—Dickens' *Pickwick Papers* —which he found left in the post-office one day when he went for the mail. He surreptitiously read the first three pages while waiting for the mail to be distributed, and then he let the book lie there in the post-office for four days, while he wrestled secretly with Beelzebub. In the end, Beelzebub won, because Hugh could not resist reading about a club that had a Joseph Smiggers for its president, and members with names like Snodgrass, and Winkle, and Tupman. He hid the book, which his parents would have looked upon with as much friendliness as a bomb, in the front of his shirt, and hoped that no one would notice his stiff bosom until he reached his own room. He read his hellish treasure, page by page, humped up in a heap under the bedclothes at night, ready to flatten out at the least alarm. His room was shared with three others, but, as the youngest sharer, he fortunately had to go to bed first.

But such a price as Hugh had to pay for his

delight! His well-developed conscience tortured him constantly. He hardly dared to say his prayers, because his conscience told him that no God would grant anything to a boy who read *Pickwick Papers*. In the daytime he hid his book under the mattress, next to the spring, but he had no peace for fear someone would go into his room and lift his mattress, and Thursday, mattress-turning day, was a nightmare. There seemed no safe place to hide that book, either in the earth or the waters under the earth. He took to following everyone who went upstairs, until Agatha asked him what ailed him. That settled it for Hugh. He had planned to read the book over again, but he felt that he did not have a strong enough constitution. The next morning he buried *Pickwick* in a wood about a mile from home, digging the grave with his finger nails, for fear a spade or a trowel would be missed.

But as months went by and nothing happened, Hugh began to feel on almost intimate terms with God again. When his father bought a new guinea hen, Hugh secretly called him Weller, although Peter publicly christened him Judas Iscariot.

So this afternoon, after Hugh was tired of

Indian chief, he played that he was Mr. Winkle going hunting. He walked about a mile down the hill that led straight away from the parsonage to where the next neighbor's house stood, stark and red, in the midst of a meadow. In front of this house, in the middle of the road, strutted and scratched a flock of obese Rhode Island red hens, with an enormous, shiny, red rooster. He was so smooth and faultless in his feathering that he looked like a toy rooster. When the hens saw Hugh, they fled into the roadside weeds, with their shrill little sons and daughters staggering after them. But the rooster evidently felt he ought to act as defender, and sidled toward Hugh with a trembling comb. Hugh crouched, and drew his bow, and shot the rooster straight in the stomach. With a deafening squawk the bird dropped upon his back, his claws in the air—curled. Hugh never waited to examine the corpse. He clutched his arrow, which had rebounded from its victim, and ran as fast as his corduroy trousers would let him, up the hill, up the front walk, up the front stairs and the attic stairs, pausing at the top of the second flight for a hunted look about him. He hid the fearful arrow, along with his bow, under a pile of ice skates, and then he ran to look out

of the little round hole which was the attic window. He knelt on the attic floor and put his small, wan face through the hole and looked down the hill until his eyes reached a certain darkish spot lying in the middle of the road.

The rooster's owners were off at a funeral and would be surely back by sundown to feed their goslings and milk their cows. They would know who killed the rooster, because all deeds of violence in the neighborhood were immediately traced to the Bloom boys. There were three hours before sundown—three hours more of freedom, Hugh reflected. He would go to prison, as murderers did. He would probably escape hanging because a rooster was only an animal and not so important as a Senator or a storekeeper. But, of course, he would stay in prison for life and in prison you wore a striped suit and ate bread and water only. Hugh's eyes filled at this distressing image. How provoked father would be, too, when he got back from Conference and found that Hugh had gone to prison and left the garden! Luke and John and Matthew and Mark were very poor gardeners, in Hugh's opinion, and the vegetables would languish in their care. Moreover, besides grieving his family, Hugh must now bid farewell to personal am-

bition. He had private dreams of being a writer. It seemed to him it would not be wrong to write a novel if one put at the beginning, "All this is not true. I only made it up." Then no one could be deceived. But now that was all over. The cheering example of the writer-prisoner, Bunyan, did not occur to him.

Also, after a lifetime of prison, he would die and go to Hell. Anyone who killed a rooster in cold blood would go to the hottest part of Hell, because everybody was alike in the sight of God—even roosters and Roman Catholics. Hugh gave himself up for lost both here and hereafter, and cried so hard that his tears rolled down the outside of the house over the blistered, white clapboards. Then he drew his head in and began to pray, wildly, as sincere a supplication as Heaven ever received. He knew better than to call God "you." He had learned that God doesn't listen to anybody unless he calls Him "Thou."

"O Lord," he prayed, "Thou raised Lazarus. Now please Thou raise this rooster. O Lord, this rooster is just as important to me as Lazarus was to his folks. O Lord, if Thou will just resurrect this rooster from the dead, I won't ask Thou another thing for a week. Amen."

Hugh opened his eyes and put his head through the hole again and watched the dark spot down the road. He watched for an hour, drawing in and praying some more occasionally, and watching the orange sun inexorably lower toward the horizon. He offered God larger and larger bribes. Never, during a whole lifetime, could he pay all he promised. Suddenly, the spot stirred. Hugh's eyes strained in their sockets. The spot stirred again, and then it moved, and then it appeared to stand on its feet and flap two indistinct wings. In spite of his prayers Hugh thought it was an hallucination until the spot crowed, and crowed again, and walked off into the bushes. To Hugh's credit be it said that he first closed his eyes and said, fervently, "Thanks, Lord." Then, like a boy rescued from the gallows, he leaped down all the stairs and into the front yard, shouting. The sky was still flushed with blue. John was going toward the barn with a pail to milk Micah. The vegetables looked as if they had grown. There were long streamers of gold light on the grass. There was still time to find Matthew and Mark and play ball. The world was a wonderful place to live in.

CHAPTER IV

DANIEL was eating a cold collation prepared for the visiting Conference pastors by the Woman's Auxiliary of the New York church that had been afflicted with the Conference session. He had been at Conference almost a week. He sat a little apart from the others with his potato salad and his salmon. His mind was full of the ordination of the new ministers, which he had seen that morning.

In spite of his own ill success so far, God's work still seemed to him the very best in the world. He thought of his own sons and wished that they might all be ministers. But, as yet, none of them had shown any signs of being "called." The girls were more religious. Agatha had wanted to be a deaconess ever since she knew what the word meant. Mary and Martha had said that they would like to be pillars of the church and give church suppers. (Their unsuspecting father did not know that they especially wished to be the ones to give church suppers because they had found out that the

toilers in the kitchen get the most to eat. They had discovered that no chicken's breast ever emerges from a church kitchen, while legs and backs issue in unnatural numbers. Likewise, the hearts of lettuce are devoured almost before they are born.) On the other hand, Dorcas desired her life work to be the artistic manufacture of funeral wreaths. She had once made a very lifelike anchor out of buttercups. Daniel smiled fondly at this recollection. He wondered if Mark might possibly turn into a minister. Mark had such a sense of God's nearness that he used to say, "Come on, God," when he went from one room to the other.

Daniel was aroused from this revery and a hard-boiled egg by a hand on his shoulder. Some one slipped into the chair beside him—a yellow little man—with a mouthful of teeth to match, and a neck as pimply as a squash. He had a large, oblong smile that uncovered his molars, and he parted his hair on the left side, combed it backward on a slant, and anointed it with bear's grease, so that not a hair ever dared to assert itself, being relentlessly oiled to submission.

"Well, well, Brother Bloom," he ejaculated, tenderly, "this is a great pleasure! How are you these days?"

"Very well, thank you, Brother Beggs. And how are you and your family?"

"Fine—except that my wife has been run down ever since the fall on account of our raising money for the new pews. That woman managed twenty-seven cake sales, Brother Bloom, and then collapsed, sir. She was magnificent."

Silence and earnest chewing. Daniel had never liked Beggs, so he could not think of anything to say.

"Brother Bloom——"

"Yes, Beggs."

"Brother Bloom—you know that Brother Dogby is running for Elder of the New York District?"

Daniel crashed his fork down upon his plate.

"Dogby!" he exclaimed.

"Yes, sir,—D. D. Dogby—the red-haired fellow sitting over there with the gray suit and the glasses." But as Daniel only continued to murmur "Dogby" to himself, Brother Beggs cleared his throat and said, "By the way, Bloom, Gobbler tells me you are being considered for Elder of Nebraska Center District. I must say I think you are just the man for the place."

Daniel looked up with a pleasant light on his face.

"That's mighty kind of you, brother," he said, "I have worked up to the place. I know the District. Gobbler has been good enough to say——"

"Well, now, Bloom, since you've got ambitions of your own, surely you'll see our little plan. We need all the votes we can get to put Dogby into the New York District. Now you vote for us and we'll vote for you, see? We need your vote and you know you need ours. Of course, if you refuse to help us, you can't expect our support."

Daniel's face was innocently troubled.

"But I don't think Dogby is the right one for the position. He's a new man. He doesn't know the District well enough."

"His fitness for the position isn't the question, Bloom. We are his friends. We will be running the District and we know the District from beak to tail feathers. He will be only a figurehead."

"But I don't think it a good plan to have an Elder the tool of his friends. The Bible says——"

"Now, Bloom be sensible. We are putting it up to you as a business proposition. It's a fair

exchange of favors. We won't ruin the dear New York District, if we do run it. All Dogby will do will be to give some of us fellows a chance who've been kept down while Poindexter has been Elder. Who knows, Bloom, but what, after you get through with your eldership, there might be a bigger chance for you in a New York District church? Dogby's a grateful chap."

"But I don't approve of Dogby," Daniel reiterated, as if he had not heard Beggs' last paragraph, "I don't approve of his methods. He's rather of an ass. I can't do what I think is wrong even to help you out, Beggs. It seems as if in God's church, of all places, men should do what seems most right and not have 'business propositions.' Shouldn't we rather all try to choose the most capable man for the position? Surely, if he be a worthy man he will give all worthy men a 'chance.' I can't go against my principles, Beggs."

Beggs rose, dusting off his crumbs on to his plate and flattening his locks sternly, as if they were threatening an insurrection.

"Very well," he said. "No one is going to force you, Bloom. I see you are as set as ever. Only remember and don't whine when somebody else gets the Nebraska Center District."

Beggs hurried off between the long, clattering tables, leaving a plateful of crumbs, and a noisome remembrance, and an uneasy heart. Daniel anxiously recalled a similar talk between himself and Beggs which had been followed by the disastrous appointment of Estey's Corners. Daniel's lips trembled a little at the corners and he tried to have faith in God and tell himself that God was on the side of the right. There was only one appointment in the Conference worse than Estey's Corners, and that was Genoa, N. Y. Daniel's heart bled for the man at Genoa, who was fortunately a bachelor, and when he looked up he was startled to see that very man sitting opposite him, drinking a tumblerful of lemonade at one swallow. Daniel saw that he had the face of a codfish. He had the same glassy eye and half-open mouth and he looked as if he had gills somewhere. An intelligent person could not help but wonder whether he would be better baked or boiled.

The next day Daniel passed Beggs, at a distance, in conversation with the bishop, and Daniel was overwhelmed to see the bishop wave his toothpick in his direction.

"That was a fine report you made of your church, Brother Bloom," the bishop bellowed.

"You are doing a fine work. You are one of the men we lean on, Bloom."

Daniel's face suffused and he glowed down to his heels. He bowed, but did not speak. As he passed on, the bishop was saying to Beggs, "Yes, you're right. The men we put in country charges either get out in a couple of years or stay there for life." And the bishop hiccoughed slightly, because he had overeaten.

At the Bloom parsonage, Hugh felt restlessness in the house during the time his father was away. His mother's head was high, and her smile serene, but she never read the children any of their father's letters. The day his father was to return, Hugh got up earlier than the sun, because he intended to spend a big day in the garden. Father would be home for supper and it would be still light enough to show him the jaunty rows of vegetables. There was a heavy morning fog curling over the top of the ground, he observed from his bedroom window, and he sagely put on his rubber boots. As he neared his mother's room at the head of the stairs, he felt a draught, and knew that her door was open. He peeped in and saw his mother, wrapped in her Paisley shawl, kneeling before her open window, the fog drifting in like smoke upon her

upturned face. Hugh took off his rubber boots noiselessly and left them standing sentinel outside the door. He patted into the room and knelt down behind his mother, pulling gently at her shawl. Like a warm wing the shawl opened, and Hugh snuggled inside. It was like being enfolded by a Paisley angel.

Like all families who have few pleasures, the Blooms made the most of little occasions. Such preparations as the girls made for father's supper! Luke slew one of his own geese and the twins spent the afternoon picking, washing, singeing, and excavating the victim. At four o'clock they were sitting on the back steps, with the goose between them; John was in the barn, polishing Balaam, ready to start for the station in half an hour; Worthy was sitting by the front window, mending shirts, so they would be all off her mind for this gala occasion, when Jacob in the yard began to bark and stand on two legs. Worthy went to the front door.

There, leaning against the front gate, was a very dusty man with a brown satchel. He wore a frock coat and a broad-brimmed hat. As Worthy stood, straight and still, for one bewildered moment, the man lifted his face and looked at her. It was Daniel. His cheeks were very

pale, and drooped curiously, and his eyes were narrowed down to two bright, burning slits, like the eyes of an animal in pain. Worthy ran down the steps with her arms held out before her. But he suddenly drew himself stiffly erect, swung open the gate, and walked forward until her hands touched his chest.

"Worthy," he said, steadily, "they sent me to Genoa."

He went past her up the steps, leaving her with her arms like two semaphores set at horizontal. She gave a little cry and turned and ran up the steps toward her husband, but at the front door he faced her.

"Leave me alone," he said, in a low voice. He ascended the stairs slowly, gradually lost to sight. When all Worthy could see was his heels, he paused, and then continued the ascent.

Worthy sat down on the top step of the porch. Lucky Jacob, who had announced the homecoming, now was asleep on the front path, his nose resting on a collection of his paws. Worthy could hear the twins squealing on the back steps and the scratching of Hugh's unconscious rake. Genoa! The word was still whirling through the black emptiness of her mind, seeming to have no significance whatsoever.

At last she realized she knew the place, twenty miles away. She remembered seeing the parsonage, very much out of repair, set next to the little chapel, whose condition was precisely the same. She looked down the peaceful front path that Daniel had straightened and trimmed, at the white fence the boys had painted. She thought of the rooms inside of the house, with the white curtains she had made, and the trim beds, each with a patchwork quilt folded at the foot. This house was tiny and inconvenient, but it had become home, and now she must leave it, as she had left the others, to face new inconveniences and new committees. Some one else would enjoy the little, growing garden.

A minister's family, Worthy told herself, spend all their lives in wandering, and, at the end, they never possess that which men consider most worth working for—a home. No matter how hard a minister may work, he leaves his family homeless, and after his death his widow is hustled out of the parsonage to make room for the new incumbent. All their lives a minister's family live in houses some one else has built whose dominant passion was economy. They never know the joy of planning a house. They never spend enthralling evenings over blue

prints. They never watch the bricks rise, row on row. The minister's wife may dream of white woodwork and a blue rug. Depend upon it, she will always have dark stained woodwork and a pea-green color scheme. Dark woodwork lasts so much longer than white, and almost every committee likes pea green. A minister's wife may like sunshine in the house, but she is told that the last minister's wife left her shades up and faded out everything. The pastor's family never can arrange their own furniture, never can choose the perfect place for the chiffonier. The Parsonage Committee has settled each chair, has bought one new rug at a sale and decided to make the others do, has counted the china mournfully and replenished glaring vacancies. (Parsonage china is always a stock pattern and very non-committal.)

The minister never can say, some evening, "The shade on that back window is worn out. I will get a new one to-morrow." He usually goes without a new shade until the old one collapses discreetly some day during a parsonage thimble tea. But if his bosom be bound with triple brass, he will speak about the shade to a member of the Ladies' Aid who will receive the news as she would the announcement of something in-

delicate. At the next regular meeting of the Ladies' Aid, she will open the floodgates of speech. There will at first be unanimous horror, and then bitter controversy. The most will say that the shade is only nine years old—a mere stripling of a shade—but a few will say that the minister's wife is a very sweet little woman. To that the majority will reply that last year she asked for a coal scuttle. In the end, a committee will be appointed by the chair to investigate the matter, and the ladies will fold up their sewing and go home to cast a shade over their supper tables. The investigating committee will wait upon Mrs. Minister and examine the shade as if it were a child born out of wedlock. In a few very kind-hearted churches the committee will take the minister's wife with them to help select the new shade or even a dining room rug, especially if her tastes be becomingly cheap. It will never do for her to combine a Wilton taste with a Brussels pocketbook.

Some of these things spun through Worthy's mind and she tried to keep them. These customary sorrows were less to think about than the more terrible truth that Daniel had failed in his ambition and God had looked right down and allowed it. That thought was like something

sour she was holding in her mouth and which she must, eventually, swallow. She was startled by the roll of wheels and saw John driving Balaam out of the yard. Balaam had a daffodil in his collar.

"Oh, John," she called, "don't go to the station! Father's here. He came on the three train as a surprise. He was very tired, so he went right upstairs to rest."

"Aw, shucks!" John said. "Wish he'd let me know."

Worthy knew John had been counting on meeting his father, and she tried to comfort one whose sorrow was capable of comforting.

"I tell you what, John," she said, cheerfully. "You and the buggy look so nice—you go and stop at Deacon Washington's and take Miranda for a ride, and I'll give you five cents for some candy."

Earth had no sorrow for John that a nickel could not heal. He grinned with delight when his mother gave him five pennies out of her apron pocket, and he was off with a great blow of the reins on Balaam's back. Balaam wanted to eat his daffodil, so he required very spectacular controlling. Just at this moment Dorcas bounded out of the front door and landed with a pounce

on the somnolent Jacob, and, before he fully woke, tied a large, black bow around his neck.

"There, mother," she said, with worried pride. "I think Jacob looks nice and expectant now and I hope father will like it. I wanted to have a blue or pink bow, but this was the only kind left in your ribbon box. You've used up the other pieces on Mary an' Martha. Luke gave me his old polka-dot tie for Elijah, and it was long enough for a little bit on Elisha, too."

"Father came home on the three and surprised us," Worthy said, repeating the disappointing formula.

"Oh, de-ar!" Dorcas wailed, "I'll bet he saw the dining room table."

"Oh no, Dorcas! Father hasn't seen one thing. He went straight upstairs without peeking, and when he comes down he will be just as glad to see Jacob and the cats as he would have been at first. And, Dorcas, why don't you find some more flowers for the sitting room? There's a place on the top of the organ that's empty."

All Dorcas needed was some artistic commission, and she was off down the path, creaking the garden shears rhythmically. Worthy rose with abrupt determination and stepped firmly into the front hall. She paused at the bottom of

the stairs, with her hand flattened on the newel post. Then, stealthily, she climbed the stairs and toed along the upper hall until she confronted the closed door of her husband's study. A closed door is as mysterious as a sleeping face. Worthy lightly leaned against the panels of this closed door and laid her ear to the cool wood. Her face was expectant, tense, anxious, desperate, then suddenly relieved.

"He's all right," she said to herself. "He's praying."

She went downstairs with no caution at all because she knew Daniel at prayer would not know if the house burned down about his knees. She made directly for the kitchen and the yellow bowl of eggs in a certain corner of the closet. She counted the eggs. There were fourteen. With magnificent abandon she took twelve eggs and broke them, deftly separating the yolks from the whites. She took the egg-beater from its nail and began to beat the eggs. At the frothy sound, all the girls collected in the kitchen and could hardly believe their sight and hearing. Mother was making an angel cake! Only those who have hoarded egg by egg, who have watched the pearly pile grow, and who have speculated on the powers of each hen, can appreciate the

superb recklessness of angel cake. Only twice before had the Blooms eaten it—once when their maternal grandmother died, and once when Matthew fell down the well and came out safe. When father came home from Conference just before they moved to Estey's Corners, mother had risen as far as sponge cake, and now here she was beating twelve whites at once, and spattering some at that.

Worthy was glad the whites had to be beaten stiff. She wanted to beat bitterness out of her system. She had often swept sorrow out of herself with a broom. Whir! Whir! She could not help but wonder at God a little. Whir! Whir! Daniel had worked so hard. Whir! Whir! But God might yet have something good for Daniel. Whir! Whir! The devil was alive and active. Whir! Whir! Perhaps the bishop— Whir! Whir! Whir! Whir! Whir! She realized with a start that the whites were stiff enough for snowballs, and she began to sift the flour and dropped a large tear right into the center of its immaculateness. She covered up the tear with sugar, and baked it, with the rest of the cake, in a slow oven.

At the supper table the family voted that the cake had never been excelled, equaled, or ap-

proached. It was a merry meal for the children. Father exclaimed properly over the trimmings, and, as soon as he mentioned moving to Genoa, they were off into a torrent of speculation as to what animals they might take with them. John said that there might be fishing in the creek near Genoa.

Father hoped the children would just keep on talking until he could get back to his study. He had almost straightened everything out between himself and God when they called him to the dining room. As soon as the meal was over, he arose to escape, but Hugh came and took his hand wistfully, and asked him if he wouldn't come and see the garden now.

When he was under the April evening sky—the sun blotted out by low, red clouds, and a night draught blowing in across the horizon—Daniel, through a cold film of tears in his eyes, could hardly see the green tips of the growing things. Silhouetted against the pale east was the frail glory of a plum tree, blossoming early. Daniel groaned to himself and wished that he could have at least stayed in Estey's Corners. The parsonage yard had never been so beautiful. He had been sorry enough to come here in the beginning, but now familiarity had soft-

ened the hard edges. That had been his life—growing accustomed and moving away. He was a tree that had been transplanted over and over, just before blossoming. No tree can come to its best that way. A tree, and a man, must live long in one place and send roots down. But the Methodist Conference expects a minister to train souls for the Judgment after a week in a new parish, and then, perhaps in a year, move on.

Hugh saw that there was no real animation in his father's voice and that his father's eyes were hard. After father had gone into the house and upstairs, Hugh went to his mother, who was counting spoons in the pantry. She had brought out her wedding silver for the supper to-night, instead of using the parsonage pewter. She was putting the large, old tablespoons, paper thin, with their deep bowls and queer, arched stems, back into their flannel beds. It was so dark that Hugh could only see her face in the dimness, and the glints on the spoons and the row of forks and knives.

"Mother," he said.

"Yes, Hugh."

"Mother, I showed father the garden, and he didn't seem very enthusiastic. Do you suppose he didn't like it? I worked so hard——"

"Now, Hugh," Worthy said, pausing with a gilt teaspoon in her hand, her voice coming gently in the grayness, "you must remember father is tired in the first place. No one can really see anything when he is so sleepy. But most of all, you know father has been away and seen a great many wonderful things. He has seen thousands of people at once, and buildings over five stories high, and horse cars, and policemen. You remember that time you went to the circus. When you came back you said everything looked so small. That's the way father feels. You wait. To-morrow morning everything will look big again to him."

Hugh nodded, satisfied. He was afraid his mother would go on to say that God knew he had worked hard in his garden and God would reward him. Hugh did not care very much about God's compliments just then. He wanted his father to praise him, and only his father. So he ran off before his mother could get to God.

After Worthy had slipped all the silver away in the flannel, she went to the back door to see if the girls had locked it properly. The door was open and an alluring breeze was blowing in, fluttering the paper lace flounces on the pantry shelves. Worthy breathed deep for pleasure and

went out on to the back porch. To the left she saw the plum tree—an angel in the half-dark. She wondered whether plum blossoms smelled. She went down the two porch steps slowly and walked over the grass. When she reached the plum she raised her arms to the branches. The blossoms were like cool feathers on the backs of her hands.

If Hugh had not slept the sleep of the just and had looked from his window any hour that night, he would have seen four patches of yellow on the grass where the light of Daniel's study lamp shone through the four panes of the study window. Daniel had told Worthy everything that happened at Conference. Dogby had won New York District. Daniel had been nominated for the Nebraska Center District, but the young bachelor codfish, who had been at Genoa, had won by a hair. Daniel bowed his head in his hands and wept terribly. Worthy, who had put on her gray wrapper and her felt slippers, and braided her hair in a tight tail down her back, sat huddled in a straight chair opposite Daniel. Her face was all animated joy. One would think she had prayed for Genoa instead of the eldership. By some miracle of reasoning, some blessed inspiration of logic, everything had

seemed to her to come almost all right while she was under the plum tree. She had stayed there half an hour.

"You know, Daniel," she said, "I thought just after you left for Conference that I would be just as happy if you weren't Presiding Elder. You would have had to be off half the time at those quarterly conferences. I don't think you are strong enough for all that traveling. I know we would both have regretted your appointment and been tired of the whole thing before your time was half over. I'm just as glad, too, we are going to move from here. This house needs new gutters and we would have had to ask the committee for them, and now we won't have to. And I never could like Deacon Newberry, though I have often prayed that I might be able to. May the Lord forgive me, but I shall be glad not to see him any more."

"There will be another Newberry in Genoa," Daniel said, despondently. "Human nature is the same all over."

"Besides, Daniel," Worthy went on, hurriedly, "it will be much more convenient to have the parsonage next to the church. Just think! we won't have any more of those long rides to church where your good clothes get so dusty.

We can put on our hats and be over there in a minute. Besides, the parsonage in Genoa—I think—has one more bedroom. That will be so convenient. Mark is really getting too old to sleep with the twins."

Daniel listened and let her bright flood of words wash over his black shores and slip back, and rush on tumultuously again in golden breakers. There was a back beach where even her courageous high tide could not penetrate. But, as he listened, he was comforted. And as she went on to speak of God's goodness to them in the past—of the trials of the righteous in this world—of the reward to come in the New Jerusalem—healing descended upon him and his heart lifted. After all, there were always God, and Worthy. He needed them both and they were part of each other. So he was able to tell Worthy about Beggs and the bishop, and, to his surprise, she burst into tears and groped for his great, cotton handkerchief. Then it was his turn to comfort her and speak about how God casts the mighty from their seats and smites the enemies of the upright. So they passed the long night that turned very windy toward morning—each high tide in turn.

When the children awoke, the house was bright

and quiet. Hugh remembered that his father, at family prayers after breakfast, turned firmly to the Psalms and read, loudly, "Bless the Lord, oh, my soul, and forget not all His benefits."

When Hugh went out into the garden that morning, the blossoms of the plum were dropped, delicately, on the grass, like manna for the Israelites.

CHAPTER V

HUGH had felt the grip of Methodism ever since he was four years old. At that age he had been obliged, for policy's sake, to go to a Methodist dentist, who was much more painful than a Congregational one in the same town. A Methodist doctor had given him most unbearable medicine, and mother always believed that a Baptist doctor could have saved little Rebecca. The one new overcoat Hugh had owned had been made by a Methodist tailor. All through his youth Hugh had been forced to give up things because they were not proper for a Methodist minister's son.

Now he was on the train, bound for a good old Methodist coeducational university. It would have been heresy for his father to send him to a university under the management of any other denomination, even though such a place might have a far better faculty. Luke and John had both passed through the same university, and, since they had been there simultaneously, money had been scarce at the Bloom parsonage. On account of this scarcity, Hugh had been forced to

remain in knee breeches until three days before he left for college. He was still unaccustomed to his suddenly matured legs, and he turned over the seat ahead and put his precious legs out upon it, the better to admire them. When the lady across the aisle was not looking, he fondly ran his fingers down the crease in his trousers.

As he ate the lunch his mother had put up for him, he was consumed by ambition. He still wanted to be a writer, as much as he had on the day he shot the rooster. No one but Agatha knew of his ambition. He had written scores of poems and several novels, and he used to hide them in a water-tight stump in the Genoa woods. Of course, his stories were strictly moral. Some one was always punished, and some one always married the princess, whose name was Helen, after Helen of Troy. His poems were mostly descriptions of scenery. There was one he had written about the moon, which gave him inexpressible comfort:

> Oh, moon, you float,
> Like a gold boat,
> On the deep, blue sea of the sky.

He used to say that to himself, with all kinds of gestures, as he lay in bed at night and could

see the gold boat bobbing between the clouds. But there had been small enough time for poetry. Hugh had had to aid the family finances by hiring out to farmers.

He remembered so well the first time he had done this. The Secretary of the Official Board, Seth Stewart, had been glad to get a healthy minister's boy for his haying. Hugh had set out for Stewart's farm with a gigantic straw hat and a tin lard pail full of dinner. Inside his clean pink shirt lay an unsealed letter of recommendation from his father to Seth Stewart. Hugh had reached down into his shirt and pulled it out, and read, in his father's regular, shaded writing:

To Seth Stewart, Esq.
Kindness of Hugh.

The expression, "Kindness of Hugh," at first seemed to put it up to his honor not to read the letter. But, after cogitation, the "Kindness of Hugh" conveniently assumed another meaning. It suggested that Hugh had a private knowledge of the letter's contents and was carrying it to its destination out of the goodness of his heart. This interpretation grew better and better, until finally Hugh believed that it was his clear duty

to look inside. So with a dutiful hand he opened the folded paper within the envelope.

Dear Brother Stewart: I am sending you my son, Hugh, aged fourteen. You will find he is not afraid of hard work.

Hugh never read the signature. The closing sentence caught his heart, and burned there, like an October bonfire. He skipped for a quarter of a mile. He whistled "Take it to the Lord in prayer" for another mile. He picked weeds and chewed them and made all sorts of sounds with blades of grass. He threw stones at a tree and caught a hoptoad.

Voiced approbation was so rare in the Bloom household. Worthy and Daniel kept the children well informed as to their sins, but left them in the dark as to their virtues. It was rather like telling a soldier all the danger he is in without telling him how good a gun he has. Hugh had often wondered what his father and mother really thought of him—if they really considered him more worth bringing up than Noah or Judas Iscariot or the new turkey, Job. Hugh resolved to outdo his reputation that day, and he shouted and forked and stacked so lustily that

he reached the parsonage at sundown completely exhausted.

The next spring he went to Stewart's again to plow, and when he came home at night he found that his pioneer grandfather had come for a visit. Grandfather had hair as white and curly as popcorn, and he was full of stories. After supper, everybody sat with rocking chairs in a conversational crescent, and suddenly grandfather, like an old Socrates, asked Hugh what he had done that day.

"I plowed, sir."

"How did you plow, boy?"

"I drove the horse and he pulled the plow."

"What did the horse get for his day's work?"

"Why—he got his food and the barn to sleep in, I suppose, sir."

"What did you get?"

"A quarter, sir." Hugh was proud of that.

"Does it seem right to you that the horse, who really pulled the plow, should get less than you, who only drove him?"

Hugh was wondering whether he ought to trudge back to Stewart's and give the horse the quarter, when grandfather laughed and said, "My boy, that is a lesson for you. That horse worked with his muscles. You worked with

your head. Now as long as you work with your muscles you will get your food and a place to sleep. But if you work with your brain, you will get a quarter."

Hugh had always wanted to work with his brain. When he was working with his muscles, he seemed only half alive, like a dull lead pencil. The metrical movements of a hoe, or a rake, stupefied him and blunted his thought. But when he was writing, his whole self seemed sharpened to an intense point. He felt life running even in his finger nails. In such moods, he lay on his back in the woods, by his stump, with a pungent wad of spruce gum under his tongue, and dreamed himself into a state of drunkenness which some men would take whisky to attain—foolish, unreasoning, and golden condition. After the spiritual spree was over, he tucked his papers away in his stump, very carefully, lest some squirrel might find and read them. Then he marched home, with a high throat, and the parsonage, and its people, and even Jacob, appeared preposterous for a moment, as his bedroom did, when he woke from a dream suddenly, in the morning.

At times, everything appeared preposterous to Hugh, and even trees seemed too strange.

Such great creatures they were, rushing up out of the earth, with green umbrellas over their heads! He told a few of these talented thoughts to Agatha, who did not understand. That made it all the better. It is no fun telling your feelings to persons who understand, because they interrupt and tell their own feelings. Silence, with a touch of awe, is the best atmosphere for confidences. Agatha had tons of this atmosphere, and enhanced the satisfying effect by two round eyes and an emotional pigtail, which trembled in the exciting parts.

One day, suddenly, behind the barn, Agatha had dived down into her dress and showed Hugh her secret betrothal ring. It was a thin, gold band, having a seal representing clasped hands, with a tiny turquoise on the thumb of one of them. Agatha wore this pinned to her underwear, and went about the house trembling. She might as well have been in love with a convict. Her lover was an Episcopalian. If she married him, there were at least five Methodist families who would leave her father's church, because they considered that the minister's daughter had jilted their sons.

Now, two years later, on the train for college, Hugh sighed to think how poor Agatha had

dutifully gotten over her Episcopalian, by degrees. He wondered if he would have any fun with the girls at the university. As a matter of fact, when the coeds first saw Hugh, the next day, he looked so defenseless and so unaccustomed to trousers, that all their finest maternal instincts were awakened. Two young ladies took an especially chaste interest in him and carried him from place to place, quite like a pug dog in a basket. He was very grateful for their attentions until, one Sunday, they took him to church, and made him precede them into the pew, while they themselves guarded the end, like two virgin gargoyles. At this insult to his maturity Hugh asserted his manhood, and refused to be taken anywhere again. He kept away from girls after that, although some of them asked him to help them with their Latin. He had heard, from Luke, that the verb *amo* had compromised many a youth. So he was wary.

Hugh expected to change and develop astoundingly at college, because the catalogue had said he would, although Luke and John had not appeared to change during their four years, except in voices and mustaches. Nevertheless, Hugh firmly believed that his courses would grow character in him, just as hair tonics grow

hair. Even the college faculty, who were old enough to know better, guaranteed that advanced Greek prose and Euclid would develop stalwart manhood, so Hugh hopefully spent a year in both those subjects. He elected Ovid, also, with the most delightful anticipations, and discovered that a year of parsing the fiercest love poems will not alter one so much as two days of an actual love affair. Hugh took Bible, too, because it would have been most improper for a minister's son to graduate without it. Hugh had to be, for his father's sake, unceasingly careful what he studied, and did, because there was a parishioner's son at the university, who wrote home often. Besides, there were sons of some of the Conference ministers in Hugh's classes—fellows with narrow foreheads and sly, watchful eyes.

Hugh had once seen a picture of a sky with an enormous, lidless Eye in the center of it, representing the Eye of God. Hugh thought that there was as great an Eye in the azure over him —the unsleeping Eye of the Methodist Church. It had been staring down at him when he was born, like a sign of the zodiac, and through his childhood it had been a constellation in his sky that never set. He had never been so conscious

of it till now, and, had he been a more brutish soul, he might never have felt its presence to such an agonizing degree. At times he thought of what flourishing liberty even a Baptist university would have meant to him. And then again, he felt that the Eye would never be off him, even in a Baptist institution, or even when he grew up and went out into the world to write books, because he knew that the Eye had stamped its irrevocable image on his conscience.

But Hugh developed in ways that he did not realize. Although he was far from rich, and a country boy, he could never have been called crude, because he had been brought up in a family that possessed both good taste and good manners. But his life had been spent remote from steam engines and factories and other refining influences. So his years at a city university accustomed him to a larger, noisier existence. The city may be said to have taken a cloth to him and polished him a little. He grew so worldly that he even could examine the pictures in front of theaters without a qualm, and he could describe the interior of an all-night restaurant for the amazed benefit of Mary and Martha.

Three other things happened to Hugh, also. The first was Stella. He met her in his Junior

year—a tall girl, who parted her hair in the middle and drew it down over her ears, without a ripple. She had the jolliest eyes that Hugh had ever seen. He thought that she was both adorable and sensible. She did not mind walking ten miles, and she often wore rubbers. In November she put on winter flannels, with long legs, visibly folded in at the ankle. She was neither subtle nor sentimental, but she wished she was. She liked to smell flowers and put them around in vases, but she never stood and looked at them for a long time, as Hugh did. She admired trees, but they never terrified her. She enjoyed poetry, with reserves. She was decently fond of moonlight. She encouraged Hugh in his imaginings, and, when he flew too far, she tugged him back again, like a captive balloon. She taught him to come to earth with a laugh. Stella's dry, restraining reasonableness was very good for Hugh. If he had met some ordinary, water-logged young lady, he might have taken to posturing. But he never realized that Stella had saved his adolescent soul. He always liked to believe that he had saved her from over-aridity of the imagination.

The second of the happenings took the roof of Hugh's life off neatly. It was a telegram he

found, wedged in his room door, toward the close of his Senior year:

Father passed away suddenly this morning.

No unnecessary "come" on the end.

Hugh read the simple words over and over, as if they were in a foreign language. His first thought was that it could not possibly be so. He had received a letter from father just yesterday morning. Daniel had spoken of the tulip beds on either side of the front path, which were his special care and pride. He had said that Worthy had a touch of neuralgia, and that Jacob was going blind, but not a word about himself.

At the Genoa station, Hugh saw Balaam and the buggy. Luke held the reins and his eyes were red.

"Hello, Luke."

"Hello, Hugh."

"It must be five by now, Luke."

"Yes, it's five."

Those were the only words spoken. Balaam, whom bereavement seemed to have made nimble, almost rushed along the road and up the parsonage driveway. There were white carnations

on the front door, and old Jacob was putting up a feeble paw toward them and sniffing.

The parlor was full of parishioners in their best bonnets. The dining room was full of parishioners who were a little more intimate and had removed their bonnets. The kitchen was jammed with parishioners who had brought jelly and meat and were entitled to remove anything.

In the woodshed Hugh found Mary and Martha and Agatha, dressed in that strange, quick black which bereaved people seem to find, as if by magic. They said that John was talking to the undertaker—Matthew and Mark and Peter were sobbing in the barn—Dorcas was arranging the floral tributes.

Mother was upstairs, sitting by the window, in the sun. She looked quite natural. She had always been pale. Hugh and she talked for a long time.

Worthy said that Daniel had been stricken at the church as he was administering Communion. He had fallen by the Communion rail and was dead when the family reached him, his left hand clutching the lapel of his coat too tightly to be straightened and folded with the other one. It had been a habit of his to hold this lapel, and Hugh was glad that he was left with the old

gesture. It would have been mockery to fold hands that never had had a chance to fold. Hugh was young enough to think of Heaven not as glorious laziness, but glorious activity. He liked to think of his father as striding vigorously around in the white robe of the ransomed. But Worthy preferred to picture him sitting quietly for hours, beside the Tree of Life, and listening to Luther and Saint Augustine, with nothing at all to worry him.

"What hymn do you want sung at the funeral, mother?" Hugh said.

"The hymn?" Worthy replied, with a firm, strong voice, "Oh, Hugh, sing 'Faith of Our Fathers, Living Still'!"

However, they did not sing that hymn at the funeral. The Official Board set their foot down upon it. They wanted "Rock of Ages." The Official Board and Methodism quite took the funeral out of the hands of Daniel's family. They arranged everything. Worthy had never liked the Presiding Elder, but Methodist custom decreed that he should preside over the funeral, so preside he did, and shed more tears than anyone. The minister who had been chosen for the funeral oration spoke with one eager eye cocked

on the Elder. It was very natural. He had to think of his future.

The day after the funeral, Hugh talked with his mother about his life work, up by the bedroom window, over the porch.

"I would like you to be a minister, Hugh," she said.

"Wouldn't you like me to be President of the United States?" he asked, almost flippantly.

"I would rather see you bishop," she replied, gravely.

"Father was very gay right up to the end of his life, wasn't he, mother, in spite of his disappointments?"

"Yes—father was gay—but he was never the same after he was sent to Genoa. People, Hugh, are rubber balls. They start out in life full of vigor, and if anyone bounces them down, they bound right up again, higher than ever. But you can't bounce a rubber ball too long. After a while it won't come up. Father never came up after Genoa. Life had used him too hard."

Worthy spoke the sentences as if she had thought them many times before, and arranged the words neatly. Hugh always felt, afterward, that if he had only pressed his mother to speak further then, his whole life might have been

different. Perhaps she would have unconsciously let him know more than she wished him to know. She desired to have Hugh think that the ministry had been a blessing to Daniel. Hugh had always been trained to believe that only the good are happy. But before Hugh could speak he saw through the window three men, in frock coats, coming in the gate. They looked so virtuous that anyone would suspect them of some deviltry. Worthy saw them from behind the curtain, and her lower lip fluttered.

"Oh, Hugh," she said, with a touching air of appeal, "I can't! It's the smelling committee."

"The what committee?"

"The smelling committee. Father used to tell me about them and say that they appeared almost before a man was cold. They are the committee the Conference sends out to see whether a preacher's widow deserves to get the pension which the Conference is supposed to give. If a minister has spent all his money, she gets the pension. If he has saved by nickels and dimes, she doesn't get any pension. These men are said to 'smell' because they try to find out just what the widow's finances are, and their nostrils are just about as good organs for them to use as anything they have."

"Did father save anything?" Hugh asked.

"Of course—he was saving for his old age."

"But, mother, how could he, with all us children?"

"God didn't let your father do very much, Hugh. But at least He let him save, and he made some fortunate investments."

By this time the committee had jangled the door bell and were scuffling on the mat. Some one let them in.

"Now, mother," Hugh pleaded, "let me go down and attend to these smellers. You aren't strong enough."

"No," she answered, quietly. "I am strong enough for them. I shall tell them the truth about our money. If I don't get the pension, it will go into some other part of God's kingdom and do good."

When Worthy was going down the front stairs, she knew the three men were rising in the parlor because she heard coughs and squeaks. When she stepped into the parlor they were standing in a cluster in the middle of the room, with their heads on one side, like sorrowful spaniels. They extended their hands as if the effort overwhelmed them.

"The Lord has given!" intoned the first, magnificently.

"And the Lord has taken away," said the second, before the first could finish.

"Blessed be the name of the Lord!" boomed the third, and was immediately glared upon by One and Two as a man who had spoiled their climax.

"How-do-you-do," said Worthy.

They introduced themselves and sat down.

"This is all very sad," said Two, who had the habit of crossing his legs and waving the upper one piously.

"God moves in a mysterious way," said One.

"His wonders to perform," said Three, and was again blighted by a look from One.

"Your husband was a faithful worker," said One.

"I know that," Worthy said.

There was something about the way she said, "I know that," which was disconcerting to the olfactories.

"Yes, indeed—we won't be able to fill his place for a month," Two said, regretfully.

"You won't ever fill his place," Worthy said.

"Oh, of course, my dear Mrs. Bloom, we understand that. Your feelings are very proper.

I merely meant that this pulpit would be vacant another month," Two said, raising a moist, conciliatory palm.

"When a man like Daniel goes," Worthy continued, "the world has lost. He was the shadow of a rock in a weary land. He was the tree planted by the rivers of water. He was the feet upon the mountains that bring good tidings."

The committee felt that Worthy said these Scriptural passages as if she had money in the bank. She did not look a bit humble, but rather alarming. Worthy felt that their noses were elongating and they were unconsciously sniffing.

"My husband," she said, "did not leave his family without provision for the future."

Three relieved snorts. There had never been a relict before in their experience who had been so straightforward. This would save a lot of time and tact, and lessen the strain on their delicacy. But for a moment they could not think of any Bible verse to reply. One thought of "Well done, good and faithful servant." Two thought of "God and Mammon," but these were stifled.

"That must be a great consolation to you, ma'am," Two finally said, with the idea that the

word "consolation" ought to be worked in somewhere at such a time as this.

"He will reap his reward in Heaven," Three added, also with the conviction that it would be almost immoral to leave the house without some reference to Heaven.

Worthy thought they were very ready to put Daniel's reward in Heaven, but she did not say so. She knew Daniel would have borne and said nothing, so she only said, "God knows Daniel."

As she said this, also, in a disturbing and confident manner, the committee felt it was time to go, especially since the desired information had been fairly rammed up their nostrils.

"Having come," said One, rising, "to pay our last respects to our deceased brother, we must now terminate this melancholy visit."

"You will hear from the Conference about your pension," Three stammered, blushing, because he was only one-third devil—an average proportion.

"Yes," said Worthy, "I know I shall hear. I expected you to come. Daniel said you always came."

It was like saying good-by to a bomb. They wasted no time. As soon as Hugh, from the

upper window, saw their frock coats outside of the gate, hurrying along in close formation, he went downstairs. Worthy was leaning against a pillar on the porch and, when he reached her, he saw that she was crying. It was the first time she had cried since Daniel's going.

"Why, mother, what's the matter?" he asked.

"Look," she said, pointing toward the front path, "they stepped on Daniel's tulips."

CHAPTER VI

Hugh did not want to be a minister. It was not because he considered the ministry a hardship. As he thought his father's life over, he decided that it had been hard for Daniel because Daniel had been too meek and long-suffering. Hugh was sure that if he ever were a minister he would trample all his enemies down, and run his sword, gleefully, right through the Eye. There would be glorious fun in that—slashing and thrusting and bursting shackles—and emerging in the end, like a young Saint George, with a conquered dragon under foot that would never bite any more.

There was another reason for Hugh's not choosing the ministry. He longed to be something else—a poet. But the majority of people Hugh had met looked upon poetry as a state of mind rather than a profession. They regarded it as something unnecessary and extra, like dessert, and were of the opinion that it could be nicely combined with some other business. They thought that poetry was all the better for

being indulged in as a relaxing avocation after a day's stern work in such respectable business as adding up columns. So Hugh felt guilty in his desire to be solely a poet, as a man might feel guilty who wished to wear lace union suits. Hugh told Stella his sensations.

"I don't know as you ought to feel guilty about it," she said. "It looks to me as if poetry might be hard work."

"Oh no, it isn't," Hugh assured her. "It's just fun. You lie on the grass under a tree, and the lines just form."

"What do you do in the wintertime?" Stella asked, with mischievous interest.

"Then you lie in front of a fire."

"Do you always have to lie?" Stella inquired. "I should think sometimes you would sit at a desk."

"Well, lying is nicest," Hugh replied. "I can always compose better that way."

"But, Hugh," Stella protested, "think! If you took poetry as a profession, you would have to spend most of your life lying down. No wonder invalids write such good poetry."

"If I took up poetry for good, I would learn to sit up," Hugh replied, very much pained.

"But I guess I have as much right to be eccentric as anybody."

Hugh and Stella were engaged. That was why they disagreed. Before they had become engaged, they had not dared to. Now it was almost perfectly safe.

"How would you like it if I were a minister?" Hugh asked, casually.

"No," said Stella, "I wouldn't. We are neither of us nice enough."

"I don't believe I'm holy enough, if that's what you mean by nice," Hugh said, somewhat discomfited.

"Anybody can be holy if he just puts his mind on it," Stella said. "It's a matter of cultivation. A person can't be holy all at once, any more than he can be a perfect painter or a perfect musician all at once. It means hard work."

"I don't agree with you about anybody being holy," Hugh replied. "I think it takes brains. But, speaking of hard work, mother recites a poem that always makes me want to be a minister. Here it goes:

" 'O it is hard to work for God,
To rise and take His part,
Upon this battlefield of earth,
And not sometimes lose heart.

" 'He hides himself so wondrously,
As though there were no God;
He is least seen when all the powers
Of ill are most abroad.

" 'It is not so, but so it looks,
And we lose courage then,
And doubts will come if God has kept
His promises to men.

" 'But right is right, since God is God,
And right the day must win;
To doubt would be disloyalty,
To falter would be sin!' "

"You recite that poem wonderfully, Hugh," Stella said. "You make my spine feel as if it had bristles on it. My spine always feels that way when I have a good impulse. I hate to have good impulses."

"How queer!" Hugh said. "I do lots of wrong things, but I hate to do them. I always enjoy myself most when I'm doing right."

"I'm a child of sin, Hugh. I always feel sort of ashamed of myself when I do anything noble. But you haven't told me whether you really want to be a minister."

"Mostly no. But the only real reason against it is my writing. I would rather be a minister than anything else, outside of writing."

"A minister would write, Hugh. There would be two sermons every Sunday, and midweek prayer meeting addresses, and talks to the boys and girls in Sunday School."

"But I don't want to write sermons. I want to write about the leaves on the trees and say they are like the skirts of a ballet dancer."

"I don't believe anybody would suffer if you didn't write that," Stella said. "But I see what you mean."

"It's the prayers I would dread most," Hugh went on, ignoring his fianceé, "and they would be almost continuous. Sunday mornings and deathbeds, especially. I never could lead a congregation in prayer. Think what a responsible thing—to lead in prayer—to lead people away from the world, right up the steps before the Great White Throne of God! I never could head a delegation like that. I would want to be on the back row."

"I'm sure you could do Sunday mornings," Stella said, sensibly. "You can always pray for the President and the nations of the world when you can't seem to get near to God. I feel sure, too, you could lead people very near to the Throne. You are so enthusiastic. And as for deathbeds, they would be your element. To see

a soul, waiting, like a boat, for the signal to leave the dock—to see some one about to know everything there is to be known—if you couldn't pray at such a time, you wouldn't be worth educating. Besides, there would be the weeping family to inspire you. You see the subject makes even me positively lyrical."

"I know. One ought to be inspired. But the very awfulness of the time would silence me. It would seem so presumptuous to pray anything to God when He was right in the room in His most mysterious aspect. Like lighting a match in a hurricane."

"If you are going to be so afraid of God's closeness," Stella snapped, "how will you ever dare go to Heaven? Don't you think God is a likable sort of a Person?"

"Whenever I think of beauty, I always think of God—and whenever I think of God, I remember beauty. But everything scares me at times—even the smallest things—because everything seems to know so much more than I do."

"You will never make a good minister if you talk that way. All the ones I've ever known were as bold as brass and talked about God like their coachman or something."

"Well, I won't ever be a minister, anyway. I

just wanted to test you out on the subject. I wouldn't now, especially since you said I wasn't nice enough."

"Oh, I just said that to discourage you. Because I don't want to be a minister's wife. I detest the prospect of a life of sacrifice."

Two days after this conversation, a month after Daniel Bloom's death, Worthy Bloom died. That was the third of the happenings which came to Hugh. Nowadays it is not fashionable to die of a broken heart, and doctors do not even permit it, but the Bloom family knew that was the cause of Worthy's death.

Her funeral was not quite so Methodist as Daniel's had been, although the Official Board insisted on being pall-bearers and the smelling committee sat on the back row. All through the service Hugh was numb, as if some one had given cocaine to his emotions. Even when he stood beside his mother's grave, rounded high with rose wreaths and lily anchors and carnation crosses, he felt a terrible desire to laugh at the tearful faces about him. He almost could not imagine why they were so solemn. He noticed that a beetle had broken into one of the roses, and his black hind legs were sticking out—the wind was

making the grass blades bend over, like thousands of little, green canes.

A week afterward, Hugh visited the cemetery again. He wanted to think about his career. He sat down on the iron railing surrounding the family plot, and looked at the two new graves—one with a light blur of green over the top, and the other a brown mass of faded flowers. Hugh felt that here lay the law and the prophets, and, now that they were silent, he seemed as helpless as a man who has lost his compass.

If his parents had been living, Hugh would have felt free to choose his own career. But now he felt almost bound to their choice—the ministry. No one likes to hurt the feelings of the departed. If his mother and father had not considered novels and modern poetry so wicked, he might have dared to cross their dead desires. It would not have been so bad to go and be a doctor or a lawyer instead. They might have gotten over that. But it seemed positively blasphemous to take up something which might shock them in Heaven, and spoil their eternity. There was a phrase constantly chanting itself in Hugh's brain—a phrase about being true to the heritage—being true to the heritage. Hugh had been

brought up to believe that duty and heritage were so much.

"I will become a minister," he said, aloud.

There was a stillness all about him that was frightening. For a moment Hugh wished, rather peevishly, that he had not come to the cemetery to decide—a place where his parents would have a distinct advantage. He did wish that God would show him his duty with a thunderbolt or something. It was agonizing to choose in this soundlessness. He listened carefully and heard nothing but a robin chirping on a mausoleum. He noticed that a bluebird had built her nest inside the urn which an alabaster angel was holding, and that a shocking squirrel, on one of the stones, was relishing a nut, with no reverence at all.

"I couldn't very well be anything but a minister," Hugh said. "Mother's going has settled it. She wanted it."

"But what of your writing?" some devil (or angel) said.

"Oh, I can combine it. That would be easy. I have to write sermons, and while I was about it I could write a poem."

"What about the small salary?"

"I wouldn't get any more if I wrote for a living."

"What about Stella? Have you a right to ask her to take up that life. You know she said that she would not enjoy it."

Hugh's decision paused. Here was a real reason why he should not be a minister. Here was a means of escape with a clear conscience. He gloated over his obligation to Stella, for a little. Then his honesty sat up inside his soul and asked him if he were sure that Stella would not want to be a minister's wife. You never could tell about Stella. She was very careful about exposing her soul. She said that open souls were as cheap as diamonds in a window. Occasionally she uncovered a corner of her feelings for you to see. Usually the more intensely she felt about anything, the more she would joke about it, and then suddenly break down and cry. Hugh would ask Stella again and make her speak true. He let the argument rest there. He would not think of what he would do if Stella refused.

He got down from his iron railing and walked slowly along the hideous cemetery roads which gardeners keep so carefully. He had to hurry because that afternoon the Bloom children were holding a formal meeting to divide the little fam-

ily property. Besides deciding a career, Hugh had to decide between his father's seal ring and his real emerald tie pin.

Stella was considered a mannish girl for the eighteen eighties. She always played the male parts in any plays presented by the females of the university. The girl who played masculine rôles was allowed by the faculty to wear a collar and tie as a concession to veracity. More fidelity to truth was frowned upon. To wear a man's collar and tie seemed to some people rather bold and suggestive, and Stella's mother kept the accounts of her daughter's dramatics from the home folks. Stella always used the latest slang, and when a person was in trouble she said he was "in the soup," a thing which her mother felt only a man should say. She had once been seen coasting down the university hill on her sled in the winter—belly floppers. Once, when one of her sorority sisters had had her watch stolen, Stella had put on old clothes and a shawl over her head and toured the city pawnshops. Once she had dressed completely in a closed cab.

But the afternoon Hugh asked Stella her real opinion about the ministry, she was entirely feminine. She wore a sprigged dress with a bustle, and a round hat that came down low in front

and was built up in back with shirred lilac ribbon. They went walking. It was almost time to go home before Hugh could bring himself to the question. But finally he drew a breath that felt cold in his lungs and said, "Stella—I've decided something."

"I knew it!" she said.

"How did you know it?" he asked, with the irritated surprise of one who thinks he has his countenance under flawless control.

"Oh, because you've been so stupid and only heard half I've said. You've breathed funny and you've kissed me only twice. When you are yourself, you kiss me a lot more."

"You don't know what I've decided, though."

"No—that's right. I don't. You may have decided to never eat oranges or wear black ties or drop Sanscrit or——"

"I wouldn't drop Sanscrit. Especially now."

Stella looked up in a flash, took off her hat with a swoop of her right hand and held it behind her, the lilac ribbons trailing.

"Let's hear it now," she said.

Hugh could not speak for a minute. The sun was shining so on Stella's hair. He thought that in a moment, when the news was broken, it might no longer be his hair. The wind came

along and lifted a few locks off her forehead in a threatening attitude.

"Stella Thrale," Hugh said, sepulchrally, "I have decided to become a minister."

"I guessed it," Stella said, "you've been gesturing so much lately."

"But, Stella, be serious. What do you think of it? You know the last time you spoke, you said you wouldn't want to be a minister's wife. I wouldn't want to take up a career that would make you miserable," Hugh said, feeling like a pricked balloon.

"It wouldn't make me miserable—not after the first couple of months. But I warn you ahead of time. Don't expect too much goodness of me. I might go so far as teaching a Sunday School class. But I never, never will convert anybody."

"But, Stella, be serious. It's so important to me. Because if you will, I will. If you won't——"

"I will!" Stella shouted, and then laid her head on Hugh's vest and cried, and he kissed her enough to make up for the afternoon's deficit.

"You're so wonderful!" he chanted. "You're so wonderful!"

"Oh no, I'm not," Stella said, wriggling away

and patting her mangled sprigs and ribbons, "I can't help but say yes. I see by your eye that you'd go and be a minister anyway, and I might as well give in gracefully at once and get more credit. Besides, a minister's wife is always in the limelight and I thrive on limelight. And most of all—what would I live for anyway, but to help you do what you want to do?"

"Wings exist to help birds get on farther and they are the best part of the bird," Hugh said.

"But what good would a couple of flapping wings be, without any nice, fat bird in between!" Stella smiled.

"Oh, Stella," Hugh said, mangling her again, "I can't allow you to make this sacrifice. It is too much to ask."

"For Heaven's sake, don't talk like the chancellor!" Stella said, sharply. "You know you're dying for me to make the sacrifice. If I said suddenly that I wouldn't, you'd be the most astonished and the maddest man. And it isn't a sacrifice, anyway. Life with you in any profession sounds enticing. I shall make mistakes. I shall have to practice calling people whom I loathe brother and sister. But I shall make a success of my calling, or expire in the first parish."

"Stella—Stella," Hugh said. "That's a very right name for you. I remember it was the first Latin word I ever declined, and it meant 'star.'"

"Well, you aren't going to decline 'Stella' now, are you?"

It was an old pun, but Hugh laughed and enfolded his star. Everything in the world about them was the same as before, but everything in them was different forever. A caterpillar was inching along the walk just as if some one had not just decided to serve his Maker. There were no opening skies or voices from Heaven. Only a town clock struck five. Hugh turned his face up to the sun and laughed with assurance.

"Darling," he said, "choosing a career is as simple as falling down a hole."

"Is it?" said Stella.

CHAPTER VII

Two years had elapsed since Hugh decided. The first had crawled, and the second had bounded. The first year Hugh had spent in Theological Seminary, while Stella finished college. At the end of that year they had married—Stella very pale beneath a green ostrich feather.

The second year they honeymooned in Europe. They considered it a bit of magic that they could. Hugh had received a share of his father's savings, and he decided that he would spend this inheritance on Europe, and leave his future finances to his future parishioners. Daniel had always said that he wished his children could have a year in Europe. Worthy had reminded the children of that, just before she died. Hugh had, besides, some money from tutoring and fellowships. He and Stella both felt, secretly, as if they were having their last fling before entering a monastery.

They dutifully included the Holy Land in their tour, and, one Sunday morning, sat on a

low limb overhanging the Jordan and dabbled their feet in the historic water. Hugh took home a gigantic bottle of this Jordan water in spite of Stella's warning that it would either break or become smelly.

The Palestine towns were mostly too odorous to move Stella, but every inch of the soil thrilled Hugh. He would slide off his donkey twenty times a day, and stand, with his hat off in the hot sun, imagining. He was bad enough at Bethlehem, but at Jerusalem he lost all logic entirely. He kept saying, "Here, on this very spot," until Stella, herself, was infected and began to collect pebbles and press flowers.

The Arabs stole everything they collected except the Jordan water, which, on account of its fiercely corked condition, never became smelly. It served, during Hugh's ministry, to baptize prominent infants of his congregation, to the edification of the parents, who felt sure that Junior could never be naughty again after such a dose. All her life, Stella detested the baptisms. The infant-elect always wiggled horribly, thereby promising to fulfill the Ritual and become a "lively member of the same." Then the melancholy parents had to promise to teach the unconscious baby the Lord's Prayer, Ten Com-

mandments, and Apostles' Creed, thus laying out labor for his youthful years. And, in closing, the minister prayed that the baby, who by this time had always shuffled off his socks, might never "run into folly nor the evils of an unbridled appetite." Even an intelligent minister had to pray that, because it was in the Ritual. But the "Administration of Baptism to such as are of Riper Years" was worse. "Riper Years" meant anywhere from five years up. Little boys in their first collars, and little girls, with their garters showing, promised to "renounce the devil and all his works, the vain pomp and glory of the world and the carnal desires of the flesh."

With the bottle of Jordan water in a satchel, and six battered bags, they drove to their first parish, in the spring. Everything important had happened to Hugh in the spring, because his life was ruled by the Conference, which always met in April. After four years of college and a year at Seminary and a few months at a German university, Hugh was dashed to think that he should be assigned to Stone Valley—a minute pastorate composed almost entirely of illiterates. There were so many young ministers, almost fresh from the plow, who, Hugh felt, could have understood the rural heart more

thoroughly. He liked to think that he had progressed a great distance from the rural heart since his boyhood. But the authorities had noticed Hugh's last name was Bloom and deduced that he might have the Bloom submissiveness.

"The first thing we shall do," Hugh said, as they drove along in a hack from the station, which was ten miles from Stone Valley—"the first thing we shall do is get out of here."

His wife agreed. The dust was up to the hubs of the wheels even the last of April, and her traveling suit was changing from a delectable blue to gray. They held hands and rode on in silence. Stella brushed her lap almost continuously with the other hand, and Hugh industriously sought a thrill for himself in the fact that he was really beginning his life work. The speckled horses lifted up their tails and smote the harness. The driver, who did not belong to Stone Valley, but was an inhabitant of the larger village at which the train stopped, felt above speaking to citizens of Stone Valley, and even his expectoration was disdainful. As they neared Stone Valley, Stella shuddered for fear that every house they approached might be theirs. She had hardened her mind to a small, white par-

sonage, so it was rather of a shock to see the horses stop in front of a sky-blue house with a white topknot.

"It might have been pink," Stella said to herself, and aloud she said, "Here's our darling house, Hugh!"

"It looks a little like the Genoa parsonage," Hugh said, naïvely, as they went up the porch steps. "Same kind of a white door with a loose knob."

The Parsonage Committee had left the key under the mat, where Stella's resourcefulness discovered it. When they entered the front hall they both sniffed vigorously. The air was like that of a tomb. Stella flew to the first windows she saw and raised them wide. Sunlight sidled into the sitting room. Stella and Hugh were fortunate in not having the Committee there to observe their first emotions. The Committee generally *is* there.

"I think the effect is better with the shades down," Stella said.

"Let's go upstairs," Hugh suggested. The stairs were strenuously carpeted in red. They passed up in silence. Then Stella laughed.

"The front room is ours," she said. "The

window looks right down on a magnolia tree, and there's a pink rag rug."

There was a bird's-eye maple dresser and a pine washstand. Hugh laid the suitcases on the oak bed with a relieved sigh.

"It's good to get here," he said, "after that filthy ride. It's our home, darling. Are you happy?"

"Never was so happy. Let's unpack. I want to arrange my set on the dresser. Then it really will seem like home. I never can feel acclimated until I see my comb and brush where they belong."

"Let's have our first kiss in our first home right now. We'll only stay here a year. We'll have fun while it lasts. Such arguments as you will have with the grocer!"

"I shall make him think I have kept house at least a century. Sometimes I will refuse his vegetables absolutely, just to scare him."

"We will get our vegetables from the farmers, most likely."

"And how I shall tyrannize over the garbage man! He will be afraid to stop at the parsonage!"

"Garbage man!" Hugh scoffed. "There won't

be any such refinement in these wilds, city child. We will have to burn our own garbage."

"Oh, mercy! Then we will have as little as possible. How filthy your face is!"

"Is it? No wonder. I'll go right into the bathroom and wash it."

"Bathroom! There isn't any. I saw that the minute I came upstairs."

"That's so. I got sort of civilized at college and in Europe, and I forgot we never had any plumbing at home. Oh, Stella, to think I should have brought you to a place where there aren't any faucets! I've been more used to it, but you have always had faucets."

Stella had skipped into the back room, which was the only other room on this floor, and was looking out of the side window.

"Come here quick, Hugh. We have the cunningest red well. It's brand new. We must have gotten here just in time for it. I see our trunk on the back stoop, too."

"As soon as we unpack, we'll eat. What'll we have?" Hugh asked, with the confident air of the male, who supposes his wife can create dinner out of a vacuum.

"Have? Whatever there is!" Stella said, briskly, hanging up her bathrobe on the appro-

priate hook. "Go on and get the trunk and look in the pantry. There will certainly be something."

Hugh rattled downstairs. There was a silence—a scuffle—ascending bangs. Enter the trunk—brown, with a rash of brass nails.

"Nothing!" Hugh announced, panting. "Absolutely as bare as Mother Hubbard!"

"Then you'll have to go straight to the grocery store!"

"What'll I get?"

"Get some butter and some berries, if they look good and aren't too dear, and two quarts of peas or a bunch of asparagus—I don't care which—and then get a steak at the butcher's and hurry right back."

"That's seven things. I'll hurry. Here's the trunk key. Be careful when you take out my frock coat, and hang it up immediately."

Stella heard the front door close and, with an anguished look, she flung open the bedroom window.

"Matches, Hugh," she called.

"All right. Suppose they don't have steak?"

"Chops, then."

In half an hour the messenger returned. Stella

had unpacked and was waiting in the kitchen, with a checked apron.

"I got sugar," Hugh said, virtuously, laying it on the kitchen table, "but that was all I could get. People here get their butter and milk and vegetables and meat from one another. I met a farmer's wife who lives near here and she asked us to come to dinner. She was very kind-hearted. She looked like the Estey's Corners women that father used to visit."

"Goody!" Stella said, "an invitation right away. They do say that ministers have lots of social life. I wonder what I had better wear."

"What you've got on."

"Hugh! This is a traveling suit and not a dinner dress. That's all a man knows about conventions."

"But up here in the country——"

"I shan't wear anything fussy. Just the magenta one with the tassel down the back. What time is dinner?"

"She said any time we got there."

"That meant six-thirty, Hugh. You better change your collar, but that will be enough for you. Now tell me how I ought to act."

"Just natural."

"No, you know very well it wouldn't be right

for me to act natural. It would be the ruination of your career at once. I'll act very sweet. It will be an ordeal, but I can do it for a few hours."

"Do you think I ought to wear my frock coat? Maybe they will be expecting it."

"I was thinking of that, but I decided you better stay as you are. We have just arrived and they will think it isn't out of the trunk. We have almost an hour and let's walk around the yard after we get fixed."

It was nice in the yard. There was a dogwood tree, with blossoms the color of mushrooms, that looked as if some one had taken a tiny black bite out of each petal. There was a magnolia tree with its pink-and-white shells beneath it, and a blooming apple tree with rosettes as perfect as hat trimming. The grass, too, was blurred with violets. Everything seemed to be blossoming at once.

"It would be just ideal here if we could always stay outdoors," Stella said. "We can eat under the apple tree, anyway, so as not to face the dining room rug too often."

"Those bunches of daffodils on the red background of that rug are rather terrible. Mother had a rug like that, and I always thought it was

pretty, when I was a boy. I suppose she must have hated it."

"Daffodils! You are an idealist, Hugh. Those are clusters of lemons."

They stood arm in arm, by the front gate, to get a perspective of their domain.

"I shall train clematis on the porch," Stella murmured. "Dutchman's pipe would be an immoral vine for a minister."

"There's the window of our room," Hugh said, "with those rose-colored lamps on the magnolia to light it."

"The back room will be your study. I will always keep a flower on your desk. In winter, it will be a sprig of hemlock."

They walked to the farmer's house, hand in hand. During the first mile Stella's slippers filled twice with sand, and she took them off and literally shook the dust from her feet. They were thinking that they had taken the wrong road, when suddenly, around a curve, a gray weather-beaten house lurched into view. It was surrounded by a picket fence, and the gate was ajar, like a half-open mouth. In the front yard was a discouraged apple tree with a sagging swing suspended from its lowest limb, and, beneath the swing, a polished brown area. Near

the front porch was a cast-iron pump, very rusty, and before its spout a washtub as gray as the house. Even a child's cart in the path was gray.

"What a God-forsaken house!" Stella exclaimed. "Wonder who lives here?"

"Hssh! This must be where we are going to dinner. They said the first house."

"Oh, it can't be, Hugh! Not possibly. It looks as if nobody ever ate any dinner here."

"I'm afraid it is, but we'll inquire our way to the Westons', if it isn't."

Hugh pushed the gate open the rest of the way and, at its creak a little, inquisitive, gray pig ran around the corner of the house and grunted at the guests, his front hoofs far apart, and his tail hostile. He was followed by nine leaping savages in bare feet. At the sight of the strangers, all of them put their fingers in their mouths, and the youngest cried.

"Shet up, Sim," the eldest said, "you take on like you never seed nobody. 'Twarnt but two weeks ago a stranger man went by."

Hugh was just collecting his voice to ask the way to the Westons', when a great gingham apron, surmounted by a head, appeared on the porch, brandishing a colossal spoon.

"Oh, it's the new minister! Howdy!" the head said. The gingham apron was switched off, and, in company with the spoon, was thrown deftly backward into the open door, where it was caught by invisible hands. The speaker was the hostess of the occasion and she bounded down the steps toward her victims with a smile as hospitable as you would find in London, or Marseilles, or Venice.

"Glad to see ye," she said, extending a crushing hand. "Step right in and make yourselves to home. You young uns, hustle to that pump and git washed. You wash 'em, Sary. We sure air glad to see ye. We git so lonely 'round here we'd be glad to see two dawgs."

Beaming, and unconscious of her visitors' exclamatory incoherence, she led the way into the sizzling heart of her home—the kitchen. That was a bare floor, straight chairs, and a huge, round table ceremoniously covered with a turkey-red tablecloth. There was a clump of tin spoons almost in the center of the table, and an iron pot on the range, to which the colossal spoon had been returned. On the range, also, was a trembling coffee pot whose contents threatened to be too much for it. In one corner leaned a long pole with, at one end, a bouquet of

paper streamers, cut from blue-and-white paper flour bags. This Mrs. Weston seized occasionally and evicted a few of the flies, shaking it in the air and scraping down the walls. This was not done in hygiene, but in self-defense, lest the insect host should devour the meal before the family reached it. Before Stella had time for self-possession, a tall, tumultuous apparition crashed some cups and saucers down on the table and then was introduced as "our eldest, Mariar." Mariar was fourteen and careworn. Her hair, like her mother's, was strained back, in a northerly direction, to a knob on a corner of her head, so tightly that tears constantly stood in Mariar's eyes. Like her mother, too, she wore an uncertain calico wrapper.

The last time Hugh and Stella had dined out it had been at the house of a Senator in Italy who was a friend of Hugh's Latin professor. The table had been laid in the garden, with a view of the sea. There had been torches and distant music. But good quality is equal to anything. After an awful moment of faintness, Stella was unshakably at ease. She offered to help with the dinner and, being refused, sat politely down on one of the straight chairs, heroically resisting an impulse to pull the precious magenta

dress up in the back. The tassel in the back, which was suspended on a long, silk cord, wound itself inextricably around one of the spindles and choked itself to death.

"How are you feeling this weather?" Stella was asking of the hostess, who had resumed the gingham apron and was stirring the pot, scraping the bottom, as if determined that no lazy particles of nourishment should skulk below and shirk their duty.

"Me feelin'?" she replied. "Miserable slop!"

Stella did not dare to answer, not knowing whether the reply was a graphic description of Mrs. Weston's feelings or an epithet hurled at the inquirer, or the pot. She had not lived in Stone Valley a fortnight before she knew that "miserable slop" was the Stone Valley idiom for a sick-in-bed condition. When a Stone Valleyite was in health, he was "common." When slightly indisposed, he was "poosley," and "miserable slop" was reserved for the worst. Stella, therefore, should have appeared very much concerned over Mrs. Weston's health, but the roaring entrance of Mr. Weston prevented her unfeeling calm being observed. Zachariah Weston wore overalls, which he called overhalls, and after the first formalities were over he slipped

away into another room and returned in a trice with a fresh pair of overhalls and his hair combed. At the sound of his amiable bellowing the nine children, who had evidently been pumped upon, rushed through the door in an irresistible column, headed by Sary Ann, who was promptly thumped on the head with the spoon.

"Set down, all!" thundered the head of the family, clapping his hands like cymbals.

Hugh and Stella promptly sat down by the table, to whose furniture fourteen bowls and fourteen mugs had been added, and the others followed, except Mrs. Weston. Evidently there were twelve chairs—enough for the family—but the two guests had embarrassed the seating facilities, so the next to the youngest enjoyed the overturned coal scuttle, while the youngest had the woodbox, which was so low that not even a generation of almanacs could hoist him properly. Without any warning, Mrs. Weston elevated the iron pot, and, after wiping off the bottom, set it in the middle of the table. Then she set herself down on a chair near to the range. Everybody bowed his head and Hugh felt the requesting eye of his host upon him. Hugh had not concocted a blessing. But here was the first

labor of his career. He closed his eyes and felt the lids cold against his eyeballs.

"O Lord," he prayed, "we thank Thee for this food and this Christian household."

So far, so good.

"May nothing be done here that could not be done in Thy sight."

Through Hugh's mind slid the thought, "Dear me, anybody would think I was expecting awful things to happen, but this is no place to stop."

"May we always be mindful of Thy watchful presence."

Termination seemed still impossible.

"May the children here grow up to be loyal followers of their Saviour."

Hugh was conscious of the restlessness of these same children. Still he could not seem to conclude.

"May their parents be rewarded in them."

Hugh heard a scooping sound and said "Amen" immediately. The youngest was towering upon his almanacs and was endeavoring to forestall his family by being the first to dive into the pot with his mug. A loud cry of "pig" covered Hugh's sudden ending, and the youngest was forcibly reseated, mugless.

"Now dip right in, folks," Mr. Weston said,

with a gesture. "Don't ye be afeerd. We don't make company of nobody. We're free and easy an' we expect everybody else to be. Now don't any of you children move till the minister has dug his mug in or I'll break the necks on ye. Missis Bloom, you step right up, too, ma'am."

Hugh took his mug and dipped blindly into the abyss until he felt a warm rush upon his knuckles. He pulled up and gallantly gave the results to Stella, and then filled his own. At that, suppressed pandemonium broke loose. Mugs were waved. Spoons flew. Blows were bandied. Stew splashed. And then, as if by a signal, the ten children settled back with their spoils.

If Stella made her mind a perfect blank, she found she could eat the stew. Once she felt Hugh's hand upon her knee and tears rose unexpectedly to her eyes. She could have wept to think of Hugh, pushed off here in these unappreciative wilds! She thought, perhaps, in ten years, she could laugh at it. Mrs. Weston, at this juncture, swooped the coffee pot upon the table and steamed the coffee into the cups which Mariar had earlier set upon the table. Hugh was genteelly offered the largest cup. It was so large that he could hold only the extreme tip of

his spoon when he was stirring the blazing fluid. When he had first plunged in his spoon and felt for bottom he had been afraid he would lose his trusty oar entirely.

After he finished his coffee, which was so strong that it could walk, Hugh was a new man. For him, some spirit seemed to shed favoring dews upon the company, just as Athene shed youth upon the tired Odysseus and made his hair curl like the hyacinth. The dinner was not such a total surprise to him as it was to Stella. He had sat in such households before. He was sad enough that he had been given the Stone Valley charge, but this dinner had made him feel like a boy again, in a blue blouse, out calling with his father and mother. He almost thought he could feel against his legs the warm tail of Jacob, prowling for crumbs. The faces of the Weston children, for a moment, took on the appearance of Peter and Mark and Dorcas and Agatha, as if the Westons were his family and he were only a brother come back after absence.

He began to talk, to tell the story of his travels, as if he were telling it to some neighbor's tableful in Estey's Corners. He felt compassionate and eager, and ever so kindly. He talked about gondolas, and castles on the Rhine.

He told about palaces, and mountains with snow in the summertime. He told most about the Holy Land, about the little fishing boats on Galilee, and the great gold star in Bethlehem on the spot where Jesus was born. Stella saw the children's mouths a row of o's varying in size from the small letter to the capital. She heard the excited breathing of Mrs. Weston. The platoon of cats, which had assembled about the feet of the family, received no attention, and when they became too strident some one kicked them. As Hugh was telling about the road to Jericho, the youngest fell over backward, fast asleep.

The spell was broken. Mrs. Weston remembered bedtimes, and Mr. Weston remembered his cows, who must be worried by this time. Hugh saw it was time to go and made the excuse of much settling to do at the parsonage. Mrs. Weston dropped a child she was publicly disrobing and took his hand in both her giant fists.

"I can't tell ye how glad we've be'n. It's be'n a real treat. Somethin' like the time we seed the balloon go up at the fair. I'll hev lots more to think about when I'm washin' and stewin'."

Zachariah, too, told the new pastor that he had been "better'n a newspaper."

"Mighty interestin' what ye said about them Bible spots. I never knew them Bible places really was anywhere. I allus thought ye hed to take 'em on faith, like the rest of the Bible."

Hugh and Stella walked home to the unequal chant of katydids. Both were smiling in the dark. At the sight of their gate Hugh's arm tightened in Stella's. As he was reaching for the key his wife said: "Why did you talk like that? It was wonderful. You took those poor things out of themselves and gave them something they will never forget. What made you do it? I would have sat there like a bump on a log."

Hugh grinned as he turned the key in the door.

"It was a combination of coffee and Christianity," he said.

And there was evening, and there was morning, one day.

CHAPTER VIII

"PURE religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and the widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world."

"If a person properly visited the fatherless and the widows, he wouldn't have any time to become spotted," Stella said, returning, exhausted, from a series of calls on the farmers' wives. She had a special calling costume, designed in Paris, but that was hanging up in the closet under a flowered cover, waiting for the next parish. She had found that the parish ladies opened their hearts to her more fully if she appeared in a white waist and black skirt. A minister's wife must be known as a heart-opener, else she had better die quietly.

By tutoring an ambitious stripling, Hugh obtained a middle-aged horse whom Stella privately called Gabriel, because he was a heavenly messenger, but to whom she properly referred in public as Dobbin. Unaware that he was leading a double life, Gabriel plodded about the par-

ish on pastoral calls, and stood willingly at hitching posts with an unnecessary weight on his reins. Gabriel had been a city milkman's horse in his youth, and he had formed the habit of stopping every few yards, with one ear pointed back, until he heard the clash of glass. His present owners were ignorant of his past and so were at a loss to cope with his behavior until one day, when they were going to a picnic, they saw him start violently when Hugh accidentally clashed two sarsaparilla bottles. They tried the clashing again with the same felicitous effect, and thereafter kept two bottles under the seat for inspiration.

There were things about Stone Valley which Stella could not forget, if she lived to be as old as Methusaleh. One was the socials, with the men on one side of the room and the women on the other. She had made early efforts at mingling the sexes, but found that they did not want to be mingled. So she accepted segregation. Nor would she forget the time the Elder was coming to dinner and she strangled the soup with rice. Another time, Hugh had leaped over the back fence with a half-cooked goose, held by the drumsticks. It had been roasting for the stomach of a visiting evangelist, and Stella was uncertain

whether it was done or not. Hugh had snatched it from the oven and run down the back yard with it dangling, cleared the back fence, up the adjoining Patterson back yard, holding his burden high above the watering snouts of the Patterson pigs, in the Patterson house, out and back again in a jiffy with the verdict, "Ten minutes more."

This same evangelist, who ate the goose, had come to the church because the people every spring liked to purge their souls with a revival, just as they purged their bodies with sulphur and molasses. They took conversion for a cathartic. Hugh and Stella had boarded the broad-hatted evangelist for three weeks without recompense, because Hugh had thought he must be a Man of God. Even Stella had believed in his holiness, until she saw him eat. Hugh would work hard all day in the parish, plowing, and harrowing, and sowing seed in the spiritual ground, while the Man of God sat out under the apple tree and spit and whittled. Then the Man of God would reap the souls and get the credit in the meetings at night, by the force of a powerful perspiration. Stella felt that the Man of God was a faker, so she grew angrier and angrier as dinners came and went. When they sat down

to that meal the man would cast a hungry eye over the table, and if he saw cold meat or stew he said nothing, but if he saw steak he rubbed his stomach and shouted, "Hallelujah!" Stella kept him on stew the last week and carried Hugh a secret chop in his study.

That first Christmas the neighbor Pattersons, who had passed judgment on the goose, gave the Blooms the best portions of their pet pig, Agnes. It was a noble sacrifice, but the recipients could not bring themselves to partake. The Blooms had seen Agnes and scratched Agnes, and, above all, smelled Agnes, so they could not bear to eat Agnes. She had been a pig careless of her person, and Stella felt that even her sausages would be untidy. So, after dark on Christmas night, they took the portions of Agnes out by the grape arbor and dug a hole and interred her. And all that winter, whenever they saw the Pattersons, they had to smack their lips. Other families that Christmas gave them chunks of maple sugar, which the children of the donors had been unable to resist nibbling around the edge. Every piece had a scalloped border of tooth marks. Hugh was also given a mountain range of turnips, for which he was not very thankful, because he knew it had been deducted from his salary of $600.

Stella had to spend most of New Year's day away, ushering a parishioner's triplets into the world. As minister's wife, she was supposed to preside over every birth, and her complete ignorance only seemed to enhance her value. The husbands of the women who were adding to their families were always very grateful to Stella for her services, and, as a mark of high respect, took out their tobacco and held it in their hands, whenever she spoke to them. So she never talked to them long, because their hands leaked.

Hugh had things, too, never to forget. They had arrived at Stone Valley on a Monday, and the next morning he had risen majestically from the breakfast table with a consecrated expression. He shut himself up in his study until lunch, when he came down, haggard and preoccupied, and shut himself up again, immediately following two rolls and a banana. This process was repeated until Friday, when he dictated the result to Stella, who typed it, using the abbreviation X for God and Xn for Christian. Hugh declaimed his first sermon to himself on Saturday, and put circumflex accents over the important words. The text was: "Can any good come out of Nazareth?" Circumflex accent over Nazareth.

On Sunday morning he sat in his study and

watched, through the window, the people gather for the service. The church was right next to the parsonage. When the bell began to toll, Hugh slipped out of the parsonage back door and into the rear entrance of the church. His hand shook as it turned the knob of the door leading into the auditorium.

This was a small, low room, painted gray, with bare wooden pews, bare floor, and red glass windows, almost Gothic. These windows were wide open, so that one could hear, constantly, the stamping of the pious parish horses, tethered outside, from whose undeserving legs flies were drawing blood. The flies, not contenting themselves with horses, buzzed in upon the congregation. Consequently, every member brandished a huge fan for defense.

All fans ceased as Hugh went up the three pulpit stairs, and in an instant waved again. In that instant Hugh had been classified. The congregation had not sat through dozens of young ministers for nothing. Hugh forgot to kneel down by the pulpit and pray to himself, as he ought to have done, and remembered it, to his embarrassment, after he had announced the first hymn, "O for a Thousand Tongues to Sing." He was afraid that if he knelt down so late such

tongues as there were would stop singing. So, after the hymn was over, and the organ had stopped puffing, Hugh plunged into the Apostles' Creed, reading it from the front of the hymnal, lest, in his excitement, he should leave out Pontius Pilate.

During the offertory, he had a nervous leisure to observe his congregation, especially to note the copiousness of children with straw-colored hair piled on their heads like haystacks. The sun had boiled every face red. The hair of the men had been molded, when wet, into various shapes in which it was hardening. The faces of the women you approached through a long tunnel of sunbonnet. The chief expression on their faces was passivity, a sickening expression to be customary. Hugh was startled to see the contrast in Stella's warm and eager face on the front seat. Even the Stone Valley babies were grim, and youngsters of two were inscrutable. Hugh felt a heavy responsibility settle on his shoulders. He had determined that he was in this place for only a year, but during that time his was the burden of lifting these impenetrable people above their chickens. This task was enough to daunt a Solomon, because anyone could see they were going to prefer their chick-

ens. The combination of gloomy faces and fans made his audience look like a heaving ocean on a stormy day. But before he could see anything more, the ushers came down the aisle with their collection plates, so Hugh had to go down to the rail to gather them up. The head usher set the second plate on Hugh's thumb, so Hugh suffered tortures during his short prayer over the plates.

Hugh hurled himself into his sermon with the best of intentions—striving to show that good can come out of Nazareth and Stone Valley. He was very emphatic, although there was such a hysterical mist in front of his eyes that he could hardly see his circumflex accents. He found it was very different, facing a whole village, from facing one family, like the Westons'. He had the sense he was bruising his words against stone walls. His ideas were birds beating against closed windows. The passivity in the faces rather frightened him. It was like setting fire to iron with a match. He ended with an incandescent peroration, and fell back into his chair, spent, casting an inquiring look at Stella, who had listened so hard that her ears felt like two hot trumpets.

Over the fried chicken, which had blackened in the pan while Stella told Hugh how wonder-

ful his first sermon was, they discussed the stone walls.

"Maybe it wasn't so," Stella said, hopefully. "Maybe you just imagined it because you are used to seeing young audiences at college, who are responsive. The congregation in our church at home had about as much expression as cups and saucers. Whenever they did bother to move their faces, it was like the curtain on the stage going up and rolling down again with a bang. When people have paid for their seats, they think it is worth while to look intelligent. Otherwise not."

"In their eyes, I was just a young 'feller' who waved his hands and pounded."

"They're used to so many young preachers, dear, and young preachers are all fiery."

"Eloquence and enthusiasm are the only things in the pulpit," Hugh said, testily. "Nobody would listen to a minister who behaved like a human being. They would think he wasn't inspired. Emotion is a big help to religion, anyway."

"Fire never went through stone walls, Hugh. It's pecking and chipping away with a drill."

"What about dynamite, madam?"

Stella had no answer for that, so the chicken

was finished amiably. But Hugh took Stella's words to heart, although he did not tell her so, and the next Sunday preached a moderately cool and collected sermon, during which he thought he observed the light of interest breaking on several noses. It was the same look of interest as the farmers had worn Thursday night at the Grange, when the potato-bug expert spoke. But during the following week a cloud of criticism hung over the parsonage. As Hugh had predicted, the majority of brothers and sisters had felt that Hugh did not have true religion since he could be so self-contained. To them it was as disappointing to go to church and listen to a quiet sermon as for city people to go to a football game and hear no cheering. When a minister perspired, Stone Valley felt repaid for a ten-mile drive, and when he occasionally sobbed, they almost thought he earned his salary. They were of lugubrious nature, so they liked their pastor to be lugubrious. The only thing they thoroughly enjoyed was funerals.

"I might as well be fiery," Hugh decided. "Besides, I enjoy it, myself."

But as he warmed to his work in successive Sundays and began to preach from notes only, he discovered that he could not always be fiery or

collected at will, any more than he could turn out a sad or gay poem at will. He was like the biblical Balaam who had to say what God put in his mouth, no matter who liked it. Religion is temperamental. Preaching is no hand-organ accomplishment. Hugh found it a nervous art —twice as racking as writing. For, when you have once written, there you are. But the sermon, like the babe in the womb, awaits delivery, and many a comely offspring is deformed in delivery. Many a Sunday the words of his sermon seemed to Hugh like so many iron blocks which he must lift and heave through the air at his congregation. Words fell into the pews with thuds and thumps. And then, other glorious Sundays, the words floated and flew about Hugh's head like colored balloons whose strings he held. Or else the words zipped back to the gallery like comets, or came out of his mouth in a silver stream and broke on the ceiling. Then were the good times when he felt absolute control of his congregation, as if there were a wire between him and every one and they were marionettes with a trained squeak.

"Prayer is temperamental, too," Hugh said. "Sometimes I can pray and sometimes I can't. Sometimes my soul has weights on. Another

time, I start to swing, and I swing higher and higher, and then I let go, and something carries me up, brushing through the cold leaves on the trees, up through the black air, up until the stars flash like headlights—farther—farther—"

Hugh used to say things like that to Stella, who was one of the people with whom you could think aloud. She never interrupted any of your baser reflections with a "Oh, how could you!" She took your evil with your good, philosophically, as one takes a brown spot in a banana. If, under the influence of night, you told her a foolish secret, she never reminded you of it the next morning.

Hugh found that the trips through the cold leaves and the black air, for which he needed much meditation and seclusion, flashed him sermon material. But such prayer was a strain on his nervous system. People usually think that prayer is no effort at all. They wonder why they don't get any effects from ten minutes' kneeling in their nightshirts. Real prayer is most exhausting. Hugh always had the sensation of being shattered and jolted as he came out of his meditations every day, when Stella shouted up the stairs that lunch was ready.

Hugh studied in the mornings and, in the

afternoons, called on his congregation. Their homes were all very much like the Westons'—some a little better, and some much worse. One especially noticeable element was the familiarity of the families with their live stock. St. Francis of Assisi was no more fond of animals than the residents of Stone Valley. Their little sister, the hen, commonly nested in the family double bed in the sitting room. During his call, Hugh usually saw a red comb jerking in a pile of blankets on the bed. Then this comb would rise, and the hen lift up her voice in praise of her latest egg, look from side to side shrewdly, pick her way to the edge of the bed, stretch her neck and look over, draw her neck in, and jounce to the floor with a squawk and a swirl of feathers. Once, when Hugh was kneeling in prayer on the floor by a sick bed, having picked out a clear spot for his trousers, a Wyandot leaped upon his shoulder and pecked his ear. She was so tame that no hunching of the shoulder would dislodge her, so finally Hugh reached up and seized her two obstreperous legs and laid her upside down on the floor, too astonished to caw. The kneeling family had considered Hugh unkind to their Wyandot, Winifred. She had been accustomed to jump on the family's shoul-

der and be tapped on the bill. But how was Hugh to know this? Moreover, how could he have tapped anybody's bill while he was saying, "Oh Lord, if it be Thy will, restore this sister?" Nevertheless, Winifred's family reduced their subscription from two dollars and a bushel of turnips to one dollar and a peck.

A great mark of respectability in Stone Valley homes was a framed marriage certificate hanging in the parlor. This evidence of actually being married was as large as a college diploma, and was commonly bordered with yellow bells and roses, anchors of hope, and a bird's-eye view of Heaven in the center. In the middle top were two oval holes left for the pictures of the bride and groom to be inserted. In a few cases this had been done. But mostly the happy pair had unselfishly inserted the pictures of their children instead, and had cut more holes for more children, until Nature's generosity was completely illustrated.

One Sunday, almost a year after Hugh's appointment, a city man who was selling nutmeg graters to the farmers' wives, happened to attend the Stone Valley church. The city man saw that here was something new and intense and enthusiastic for a fashionable church, so he

told his Official Board. Since their church had a minister who was as unenthusiastic as a convict, that Official Board was desirous of a change in incumbents. So they sent a committee to inspect Hugh. On the Sunday morning they came Hugh knew it was a committee by the way they all sat together in a row, like tomatoes on a window sill, and tried to look separate. Hugh looked down from the pulpit at Stella, and saw by the calculating glitter in her eye that she, too, had seen.

It might be one of the bad Sundays and here was opportunity sitting in the third row from the back. Hugh wished that God could be bribed for inspiration. But the more he let his irrepressible mind wander on irreligious thoughts, like an increase in salary, the farther he got from inspiration. His life depended on his being spiritual, but you cannot consciously be effectively spiritual, any more than you can take a good picture when you are posed. Hugh felt as baffled as a dog at the bottom of a tree. During the Apostles' Creed he was sure he was coming undone like a bundle, with no one to hold the string. He had no sensation of legs at all. Only head and neck, and, occasionally, arms. The top of his head banged like a loose

blind, and he longed to reach up and fasten it. When it was time for the pastoral prayer he closed his eyes and cleared his throat. He did not remember what he prayed. Stella said, afterward, that it was perfectly coherent, and included Congress and those unable to be present.

"Not your best, Hugh, but the committee wouldn't know the difference."

"It seems too shameful to pray for an audience who is weighing and balancing," Hugh said. "Our relation with God ought to be as private as the marriage relation. I have gotten accustomed to public praying with my own congregation, but that committee was criticizing every sentence. Lord! I felt like an actor. I'll swear their eyes were open and their noses resting on top of the pew in front of them."

When Hugh opened the Bible to read the text of his sermon, and saw a flawless page of the Psalms, he was steadied for a moment, as one is who suddenly sees the ocean. He began to read:

"When I consider Thy heavens, the work of Thy fingers, the moon and stars which Thou hast ordained;

"What is man that Thou art mindful of him? And the son of man that Thou visitest him?"

Hugh almost forgot his own little drama for a moment. But as he lifted his face he caught sight of the committee blowing one of its noses, and when he turned to his notes, the words positively grinned at him and made obscene gestures. He threw the first paragraph at his audience. It was very heavy. He grew desperate and thought to himself that he didn't care how he preached now.

As he steadied himself for the next paragraph, he had a vision of his father standing behind the Bible in the Estey's Corners pulpit, with his hand on the lapel of his coat—and the old, hoping look. At that a light seemed to pour into Hugh through his mouth, filling him to the brim and even bloating him a little. When that subsided, he saw his subject leading before him as definite as a railroad track. He was the locomotive, and the divisions of his thought were as inevitable as curves and crossings and stations. And the words! Some Sundays they had been as hard to find as water in a desert. His brain had parched and his tongue had lolled out. But now there were three or four for every meaning. He could pick them as leisurely as berries.

"What do you think the committee thought?" he asked Stella, anxiously, the minute he saw her alone.

"I don't know. I didn't dare look around. I think they must have left during the last hymn."

"Yes, they did. What did my own people think of my sermon?"

"You couldn't tell. Mrs. Thatcher asked if you had a headache."

In three agitated weeks, the rural free delivery brought something from the committee in a long envelope. Stella ran, wobbling, through the yard from the mail box and burst into Hugh's study without knocking. She surprised him on his knees, but he arose, very alertly, with all his faculties about him. The envelope contained what ministers know as a "call" from the church the Official Board represented—the Church of the Holy Spirit at Mount Vincent, New York. The Official Board of that church had gone out in squads, like Israelitish spies, peeking into Canaan, and had listened to various renderings of the Good Book in various churches. This special squad had returned with a favorable report of Hugh, like grapes upon their pole. So he was "called" and the present pastor was deposed, which was only the way of the world.

The wife of the present pastor had just recently had twins, but triplets would not have saved him, when the collections were diminishing.

"A salary of fifteen hundred a year!" Stella murmured, thinking of a yellow chiffon dress trimmed with blue.

"A city church!" chanted Hugh, thinking of cultured congregations in cutaways, and shivering a little.

"The largest in Mount Vincent," sang Stella, antiphonally.

"Maybe the bishop won't let me go," Hugh said, trifling with a black thought, as a person may put up a black umbrella in the sunshine.

Stella bristled.

"I'll attend to him," she said, with an awful emphasis on the him.

"Maybe I'm not worthy of it," Hugh continued, putting up another umbrella. "It's such a big jump and I am so young."

"Bosh!" Stella exclaimed. "You are absolutely worthy in every detail. To think you are unworthy is not modesty, but a poor sense of values. Lots of people who are unworthy get places because they think they are worthy."

"I shall go to Kingston with Gabriel to-mor-

row," she said, a little later. "I shall buy you three pairs of pajamas. Then we can pack."

"Pack! With Conference a whole two weeks off!"

"I can't wait to begin. I'll do a few things, anyway, so as to look sure we are going."

"When you are in Kingston get yourself that pair of side combs with the beaded gold tops. We can surely celebrate that much on our future."

At this interesting minute Mrs. Wyant's smallest son knocked on the front door to say that the minister must come right over because his aunt had a bad turn. The aunt was noted for her bad turns, which she called "high strikes," and which may be translated as hysterics, so Stella did not feel as sympathetic as a minister's wife should. She had an almost irresistible impulse to say to the boy, "Bother your aunt!"

"I shall be so thankful," she said to Hugh, when he returned an hour later with the news that the aunt had stopped turning, "I shall be so thankful to get away from that aunt. When I think that I shall never have to hear about Sister Crabtree's ringworm, or Sister Perth's miscarriages, I could get right down on my knees and gloat."

"There will probably be a whole new set of diseases in the next place," Hugh replied, in a very unidealistic strain. (He had often had to be a body doctor as well as a soul doctor to his people. Sometimes a dose of castor oil will cure an attack of doubts, and calomel is good for agnosticism.)

"But they will be more stylish complaints," Stella said, "like neurasthenia and neuritis. And they won't have such gory details."

The next day Gabriel went to Kingston and returned with pajamas and combs and a yellow-and-black bathrobe for Hugh that resembled sheet lightning. These last two weeks were the days that the final hard-wrung installment of Hugh's salary came in, with every turnip and drink of water deducted. Hugh had to collect his own salary, with prayers and threats. The last lap came in quart jars full of pennies. Hugh felt a pang at the sight of this grimy payment, until he counted and found it fifty-eight dollars short. When you get only six hundred a year, fifty-eight is a heart-breaking deficit, and it meant that the side combs and sheet lightning would have to go back. Stella told Hugh he ought to do what his predecessor had done—preach a sermon on Hell and then make a house-

to-house canvass. But Hugh did not feel equal to the ordeal. A few of the farmers felt a little ashamed, because Hugh did not complain, and one attempted to press a pig upon him, and another eased his conscience with carrots. Another aged female saint painted Hugh a picture of some pansies in a bowl. This was much admired, and the parish mind was now at ease regarding the deficit. Other offerings of this same aged saint hung on the walls of the parsonage. There were water lilies, and half-open roses, and a trout in the dining room.

Hugh went to Conference in a gray sack suit, a brown tie, and a scarfpin adorned with a green beetle. He looked prosperous and worldly from his neck down, at least.

"Father always wore a frock coat," he had protested, knowing he would be overruled.

"Hugh, I believe if your father had had three ears, you would try to grow one."

The bishop was willing, so Stella began to shop and pack in earnest, and she sold Gabriel at a profit. When the news was broken to the parish, Hugh had expected some complimentary emotion, but the parish manifested only a pleasant anticipation of the next man. One could

not blame them, because the only variation in their lives was a new baby or a new minister.

Exactly one week after Easter, Hugh's and Stella's train tramped out of the station, erect.

With new suitcases, they were facing their fashionable future.

CHAPTER IX

Hugh had written one sonnet on the death of old Jacob, and he sent it to Agatha, who immediately framed it. Agatha had married a farmer with a big heart and big acres, and she was conscientiously bringing up her younger brothers and sisters. Luke had become a lawyer, and John had disappeared in Colorado. Old Jacob spent his last days with Agatha, and was buried with pomp under her apple tree.

But, outside of Jacob's epitaph, Hugh had not written any poetry since he left college. The year in Europe had been too crowded for poetry, although he wrote a nice prose bit about the Arabian camels, which Cook's Tours bought for an advertisement. The time at Stone Valley had been no more fruitful. He had promised himself that, in the quiet of his study, he would create, but he never went further than drawing eyes on a clean sheet of paper. Somehow, poetry had not seemed compatible with Stone Valley. Hugh consoled himself with his youth, and said that Cato had not learned Greek till ninety.

Surely he could afford to delay a bit at his age. But he promised his æsthetic conscience that he would write at Mount Vincent.

Hugh's church at Mount Vincent was an ivy-covered stone structure called the Church of the Holy Spirit. Because of its four grinning gargoyles on the four corners of its tower, the Catholics of the city called it the Church of the Holy Bullfrog. It was situated right at the beginning of the fashionable district, where the houses were set far back, with fountains and fancy fences.

The parsonage did not have a fence, but was built on a terrace. It was nicer than any house Hugh had ever lived in. It boasted a bathroom with a porcelain tub, and, at first, Hugh washed himself twice as often as necessary, just for the fun of turning the faucets on and off. Stella took the plumbing more as a matter of course, and was not so foolish about it. She spent her time exclaiming over the ugly, elegant parlor furniture, especially the rosewood cabinet for curiosities, with curved glass doors. Into that Hugh promptly put the bottle of Jordan water, and a pair of chopsticks, and the hairpin of a Fiji Island woman, which a missionary had given him. Upstairs, all the bureaus and tables had marble tops with swollen black veins, and the bedsteads

were unanimously brass. When Hugh awoke in his bed, the first morning, he thought he had reached the golden streets.

Hugh's study was in the church, next door, and it was very convenient for Stella to be able to tell traveling evangelists, and parishioners in a fright about their salvation, that Hugh was, truly, out. If she had not been a Cerberus with three jaws, Hugh might have spent all his time receiving callers who thought that a minister had boundless leisure. As it was, a traveling evangelist had to quote almost the entire Bible before Stella would let him in, and he never got in if he referred to Hugh as the "dominie." Hugh, all tenderness, had once bought an encyclopædia from an agent who called him "dominie," while Stella was out with Gabriel. After that Stella shivered whenever she left him unguarded for a moment.

They had been at Mount Vincent just two weeks, when they were formally invited to dine with the President of the Official Board. The President had obtained that office because his house was farther from the street than any other house, and there were iron lions with lifted right paws and surprised nostrils on his gate posts. He was a little red-haired man, this Mr.

Andrews, rather round-shouldered for a pillar of the church, with large pores, and the alert look of a pair of shoes some one has just stepped out of. He sent his carriage for the minister and his wife on the night of the dinner. After Stone Valley, it was heaven for them to ride between those lions, behind a genuine coachman, and horses with whisk-brooms on their necks. Hugh bent forward in his seat, like a stiff doll, but Stella leaned back against the upholstery, with her chin lifted.

As Hugh looked himself up and down in the huge cheval glass in the Andrews' dressing room, he reflected that this was the first time he had ever seen himself full length, except at a tailor's. He was shocked to realize that he did not know his own legs, although he was tiresomely familiar with his chest.

On a low, walnut table, near the mirror, there were yellow sweet peas in a spreading yellow vase, with tiny opalescent peacocks strutting along the edge. Hugh had never seen yellow sweet peas before, and he almost thought that these were made of silk and gilded. He wished that he could give such sweet peas to Stella, to wear on her lavender dress.

As he descended the massive staircase, wide

enough for a buggy and a pair of Balaams, he saw at its foot the little red head of his host and the overstuffed bosom of his hostess. Mrs. Andrews was all bosom. No one ever seemed to realize any other part of her. And yet, in spite of her convex façade, she had a very shy, emaciated soul, and she was absolutely obedient to her much smaller spouse.

Every one was obedient to her spouse. He was one of those rich men who are proud of working from seven in the morning until eight at night—as if work were like religion—the more the better. Although Mr. Andrews thought that he was a Methodist, his religion really was work, with a dash of patriotism. The patriotism manifested itself in the fact that he did not believe in foreign missions. He did not believe in any form of charity. He did not like to spend money, even on himself. Every night he took the subway to Van Cortlandt Park and then took the trolley to Mount Vincent—to save the train fare. Every year his birthday was celebrated in the newspapers, and some interviewer said, "This millionaire, this great founder of the andiron industry and inheritor of the cuspidor industry, rides home in the subway to his palatial Mount Vincent residence because he is essentially demo-

cratic, because, as he says, he loves his fellow men and wants to be close to the beating, seething heart of the people." W. F. Andrews ruled not only andirons and cuspidors, but also the Church of the Holy Spirit. He had been President of the Official Board for twenty years, and enjoyed Periclean privileges. But Hugh did not yet realize the magnitude of his host. When a man has hairs sprouting out of his ears, it takes some time to recognize his greatness.

When dinner was announced and they had paraded into the dining room, Hugh's eyes grew childishly round as he saw the mighty silver fruit dish on the carven sideboard—its burnished bowels brimming with red apples, and striped bananas, and glinting grapes. That had always been one of Hugh's tests of real opulence—a fruit dish carelessly full of uneaten fruit. In his childhood the appearance of any fruit on the poppy plate in the dining room had been thrilling, but brief. In a few hours the poppy plate was reduced to a core. Such a thing as an orange lasting overnight was unheard of.

Besides the fruit dish, Hugh could see, from where he sat, the oil portrait of Andrews's father—the one from whom Andrews had inherited the cuspidors. He was a convivial old

soul, who was trying hard in the painting to look like an ancestor. But Hugh could easily imagine him using the article he manufactured. However, Hugh did not have much time to observe. He was tremendously occupied with the dismaying multitude of forks and spoons that surrounded his plate. He had a general idea that, with the ones at the sides, he should begin at the outside and work in, but he did not know what to do with those lying across the middle. He remembered, as if it were ever so long ago, the simplicity of the first dinner at the Westons', in Stone Valley.

Stella was sitting where she could see the crystal closet, and she yearned for it, as the sea yearns for the moon. She saw a great platter, with orange flowers on it, and cream-colored plates with gold bands, and gold bouillon cups inlaid in rose and blue. There was a tea set bordered with black butterflies, and the neck of the teapot rose like the neck of a swan. She almost wished that Hugh made andirons instead of sermons.

Hugh was asked to say the blessing, but he had thought one out, so it was not exciting. However, even unpremeditated blessing would not have been difficult for Hugh in this atmos-

phere. It always seemed to him so easy to be uplifted in the midst of cut glass. He believed that beauty inspires goodness.

After the blessing and the soup, the minister and his wife were enjoying the flaky fish and talking about the weather, when suddenly the host held up to view a fish bone he had found, contrary to all culinary laws. He looked at it peevishly, laid it down on his butter plate, and called for a finger bowl. Stella was disgusted with this delicacy, but Hugh, although he really knew it was silly, rather enjoyed it. The action savored of finesse, of the connoisseur, and was such a refreshing change from Stone Valley people. They would not have minded finding anything in their fish.

"My dear," Mr. Andrews was saying, as he immersed his digits and dried them, separately, "this is the fourth bone I have found this month. Kindly inform Elizabeth."

"Yes, dear," answered his wife, with the sigh of one who has heard those same words before. Hugh saw that the "dears" meant nothing. They were only convenient vocatives.

The talk naturally turned to food. Hugh and Stella heard familiarly discussed dishes they had never dreamed of eating, even in Europe—

calves' brains, pigs' knuckles, braised pheasant, artichokes, and young guinea hen (somehow the adjective "young" seemed so pathetic!) They heard what mock turtle really is. They learned that filet de mignon, which Stella had always supposed to be rather wicked, is only tenderloin of steak. Then Mr. Andrews found a string in his string beans and could not have been more indignant if he had found a nigger in his woodpile. He held the string aloft, a dangling green thread, and the atmosphere became intense.

To change the subject, and also to give Hugh a chance to shine, Stella plunged into Europe. But the Andrews began to talk about European food and the best places to obtain it. Evidently the Andrews in their European tours, like Napoleon's army, traveled on their stomachs. Mr. Andrews remembered that he had taken castor oil at Cairo and that their abdomens had been martyred in Palestine, the land of poor food. Also they had encountered some unmentionable insects at Jerusalem. The Andrews's Palestine trip had been a great test of their Christianity, but they had felt amply repaid for it because, at an enormous price, they had been able to purchase some nails of the true cross, which were now enshrined in the Andrews cabinet, along with

conch shells from California, and a pebble from Lake Como, and a spoon from Pike's Peak. Hugh smiled to himself, because he had seen nails of the true cross in every museum in Europe and Asia. Stella reflected that at least their own Jordan water and Fiji hairpin were genuine.

After dinner was over, at last, they sat in the library—a room of golden-brown portières between handsome bookcases reaching to the ceiling. Mr. Andrews never read, so, naturally, he had beautiful bindings. He did not like his books to be imperiled by being opened, but he magnanimously allowed Hugh to exclaim over his leather treasures. Stella could not properly rouse enthusiasm for his first editions—horrible, musty, old things with terrible print and bad illustrations. Stella would just as soon read out of the sixteenth edition as the first, so long as the words were the same. But Hugh manufactured some antiquarian sensations, and these he enlarged upon to his host's satisfaction.

"Yes, sir," his host said, rocking on the toes and heels of his perfect patent leathers (Hugh's were chipped a little, with uneven trails across the toes), "yes, sir, there's more money in these books than your whole church cost."

Hugh felt a bit frozen. It seemed irreverent

to him to compare the cost of a church with anything—even with books. It was like comparing the cost of Christ's clothes with your own. But a week later he heard another parishioner proudly compare the cost of his latest bathroom with the baptismal font he had given to the church. It was only his way of appearing businesslike and hard-headed. The committee who were appointed to buy a new Communion service went to New York and bought the set in the morning and went to the musical comedy, "Pink Legs," in the afternoon.

Stella's life now became a succession of rich meals, interlarded by calls from ladies in plumes and accordion pleats. She and Hugh found the table talk at the various houses not always about food, but always about possessions. Stella thought that the Mount Vincent people invited the minister's family to dinner so that they could have some one to astonish with their possessions. They could never astonish a person of their own financial standing. The conversation never turned to religion. Hugh tried to bring it about, but they looked at him reprovingly, as if church were the only place for that. But Hugh could not see why he should not talk about his business as much as they talked about their business—

their oil, their court-plaster, their andirons, their Dr. David's Blood Builder, Good for Man and Beast.

On Sunday mornings Hugh ascended a pulpit with a mossy-green carpet, discreet walnut pulpit furniture, and a choir screen carved with cherubs. The decorous organ would sound genteelly over the small, rustling congregation as they were escorted down the aisle, as if they had seat checks, by unctuous ushers in cutaways and gray gloves. Hugh, during the first part of the service, would be driven almost mad by the whispering of the choir just above the back of his neck. Then he would lean out over the great pulpit Bible, with its long, crimson book mark, and view, instead of the stone walls of Stone Valley, a collection of amused icicles.

The congregation thought it was "the thing" to go to church, especially since the intense young minister had come. He was so entertainingly solemn. He was so desperately earnest. He was quite the sensation. Lack of any real religious feeling made the atmosphere of the church so congealing, even in summer, that Hugh's emotions were frostbitten unless he was careful to cover them well. Ladies, after service on Sun-

days, pressed his hand in the vestibule and told him he had made a "beautiful prayer."

"Beautiful prayer!" he exploded that night in his bed. "When I was trying to give them inspiration, light, union with God, a sense of sin and forgiveness, of Heaven and atonement! And she called it a 'beautiful prayer'! If she had been deeply stirred, if she had gotten my meaning, she would have been silent. If anyone else says anything like that I'll burst all over the vestibule."

Yet, the next Sunday, he bore without collapse another lady's telling him he preached a "sweet sermon." In his most exalted moments, if he glanced down from the pulpit and saw one of those cool, faintly smiling faces, he flattened. Sometimes he thought they were rows of well-dressed devils, with their horns under their hats, their hoofs in silk stockings, and their tails knotted up inside their clothes. They were watching him open his heart, and enjoying the contents. When they had seen enough they would turn to the next sensation. As for the fifteen hundred they paid him—that was absurd. Any of them would have spent that amount on one party. He had found out that the last minister was paid three thousand. They had gotten Hugh

Bloom cheap from the country. So they liked to patronize him, and they carried over the same obliging attitude to the church.

"I don't go very much to church," one gracious lady said, "but when I do go I patronize yours."

Stella was perilously contented. She liked carriage wheels. Of course, the women were a little condescending, but Stella practiced condescending, herself. She was better educated than most of the women, and she let them know that. They began to ask her opinion about their new pictures. She passed judgment on curtains and colors. Hugh, seeing Stella's happiness, was almost contented, himself.

After all, his future was assured. When they tired of him they would find him another downy location. Perhaps a rich old lady would leave him comfortable in her will. So many rich old ladies, if properly cherished, did that. A pastor who had a dowager's soul in charge was considered lucky by his peers. It was as if Heaven were a select club and the dowager paid an initiation fee. Only there often was trouble when two ministers simultaneously approached the same dowager. There was such a wearing uncertainty as to the state of her affections. Then, too, an old lady was discouragingly unstable. At

the last minute she might become a Christian Scientist and revoke all former wills.

But many a minister has patiently amassed his fortune by bringing the gospel light pleasantly to successive old ladies. The exertion is slight, compared with the recompense. The rich make only a few demands of a minister. He must be a "good fellow" and not interfere with their diversions. He must not make pointed references to Pharisees. He must pad his conscience and take sin with a sense of humor. He must picture God as an indulgent Grandfather instead of a stern Father. He must assure his congregation they are saved, as if salvation were a permanent sterilization for the next world.

Hugh's heart fell as he pondered these things. He could not bear compromise. He did not even know the smell of diplomacy.

"Good heavens!" he thought. "I am not a monkey, hired to make faces every Sunday! I am not a kind of insurance against hell. I am responsible to God for these people. I must show them a new heaven and a new earth. I shall find a way to their hearts. There must be some way to touch them. They shan't be comfortable a week longer!"

But he really did not declare war until he read

that Mrs. Willis, the Superintendent of the Primary Department, had been seen at the races in a cowskin coat. Mrs. Willis owned a farm just outside of Mount Vincent. When spring came, she killed her black-and-white cow and wore the skin complete, lined with purple wool, causing more than a sensation at the races. She wore the coat to church, the next Sunday, the cow's horns, highly polished, swinging in the front on long, purple cords.

This incident was immediately followed by the flight of the Blythes. Hugh and Stella went to the Blythe home to dinner, one evening, and found, the next morning, that they had left town in the night, outwitting raging butchers and grocers.

"I am not having the slightest influence!" Hugh raved. "I am only harmless. Stella, we ought to be the kind of people who inspire goodness. We ought to be held in such respect that people would not dare to invite us, and be planning getaways and talking trash!"

The following Sunday morning, Hugh, after a private prayer for common sense, delivered a denunciatory sermon. There was nothing unusual in the theme—the dangers of materialism. But he strove to make his hearers uneasy. He

said that rich people, despite the parable about the camel and the eye of a needle, ought to be less materialistic than poor people. The poor are obliged to have their minds on the problem of existence—on spools of thread, and beef bones, and five-cent loaves of bread. But rich people have leisure to be not of this world. They have the time to be poets and saints.

Hugh was not certain how this was received. After service everyone behaved normally. There was no special, secret meeting of the Official Board to draw up a rebuking resolution. So, the next Sunday, he preached stronger medicine: "And if I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing." Hugh attacked the polite philanthropies. He did not mention names.

"I can't mention names and be mean," Hugh had said. "It ruins my sermon. I begin to feel so puny and peevish, if I do that. Like a little bantam rooster hopping up against a wire fence. I've got to preach largely or I can't get God into my sermon at all. You can't imagine God scolding and shaking His finger at anybody."

The second sermon aroused delicious sensations in the bosoms of the ladies. Mrs. Lynne said he had made her shiver. Mount Vincent

enjoyed being denounced. It was another new sensation. Thunderstorms from the pulpit were an exciting change from fair weather. As long as he did not mention names, everyone thought he was attacking the next person. The more generally fearful things Hugh said from the pulpit, the more delighted everyone was. People invited their friends to come and see the new volcano in eruption. They asked Hugh to dinner more and more, and expected him to denounce at their dinner tables. He became as popular as Jeremiah or any other weeping prophet must have been, for a time, with Old Testament *élite*. The ladies in the vestibule now told him his sermons were "thrilling," and when somebody called him a "Christian cave man" his disgust went fathoms deep.

Hugh, himself, knew that denunciatory sermons are very restful to the intellect. They require no brain power—just good lungs and a couple of grievances. Some ministers always preach in that way, elaborating on a fresh grudge every Sunday morning. That breed of minister generally reviews a popular novel every Sunday night. Those pastors know that to give a congregation a calm, constructive program of good living takes brains. Attacking is so much

easier, and, besides, your congregation thinks it is getting more. Congregations do not know how difficult it is to get refreshing religion from stale texts—to use worn themes in a new way, so that the people in the pews will not say, as soon as the text is announced, "Oh yes—prodigal son—I know about that," and go to sleep.

Hugh's audience, now, did not dare to slumber during the sermon, for fear he would say something improper and they would miss it. But Hugh realized that his large, impersonal methods were getting him nowhere in reformation. He saw that the people would soon cease to delight in the new menu at Morning Worship and be simply bored. One Saturday night, late, he locked up his study with the resolution that tomorrow he would preach a hair-raiser. He would attack, not with a paper of pins, but a carving knife. He took the pleasure of a Crusader in anticipating how fierce he would be. He picked his way across his back yard in the cold darkness. It was midwinter and the path was icy. The air was so still that he could hear the skeleton vines on the black church walls rubbing their bones together. He let himself into the back door with his key. There was no light at the rear of the house. He groped through the kitchen,

and at the door of the dining room he ran into something stiff and white.

"My! what a start you give me!" the something said. "I was just comin' over to tell you. You have a nine-pound girl, sir, and Mrs. Bloom is doin' fine."

CHAPTER X

They called the baby Helen, because Hugh had never forgotten that the princess in his stories was always named Helen, after Helen of Troy. Nine pounds of daughter was a heavy weight to throw into the scale of Hugh's life, for Hugh was one of the men who take fatherhood hard. For a time Helen overbalanced everything else. Hugh preached nothing but cheerful and non-committal sermons. He did not care very much about anyone's soul. The temperature of Mr. Andrews's religion did not seem so important as the temperature of a bottle.

Helen awoke at five every morning. She was not a model child. No clever baby ever is. And from five in the morning until six o'clock at night Helen's life was a series of ups and downs. There was peace after six—a kind of alarming leisure—but the two survivors were too fatigued to enjoy it. Stella went to bed soon after dinner, and was often wakened by the prayer-meeting bell. Hugh would sit down at his desk, determined to enjoy this stillness, and he would nod

over the New Testament in twenty minutes. He became too tired to pray, or do anything but hold on to life by main force. In Sunday evening service he did not dare to join in the hymns because, as sure as he opened his mouth wide, he yawned.

The thought of the baby was with him constantly, like a hangnail, during the church services—during the prayers, and the Creed, and especially, throughout the ritual of Baptism. Hugh noticed in himself a new, profane attitude toward the baptismal service. Before the birth of Helen, a row of neophyte babies had been just a bald-headed row to him. But now he found himself regarding these mites critically and giving fervent thanks that Helen was not as one of these. Sometimes he grew so engrossed in calculating their weight and their prickly heat and their intelligence, compared with Helen's, that he baptized them as if he were bathing them. It was very disturbing. When he made pastoral calls, he talked babies until he was doubly popular with young mothers, and unpopular with delicate-minded spinsters who would prefer damnation to a diaper.

It goes without saying that Hugh had not yet preached the hair-raiser. In the first place, sal-

vation did not seem as important to him as a good night's sleep. In the second place, it did not seem quite right to slash into people who had just flooded the house with bootees and wee cashmere coats. Moreover, having a baby had not increased Hugh's general popularity, although he was unconscious of this. His congregation realized that it was perfectly lawful, and even biblical, for him to increase and multiply, but it did not seem quite appropriate, and was, they thought, rather out of taste, especially when he had acted so fierce and gloomy. If Hugh had known this, it would have convinced him doubly that he ought not to risk losing his place. It was all very well for Stella and him to wander the streets, excommunicated, but a three-months-old baby needs a roof over its fuzzy head.

But when Stella took the baby off to Agatha's farm for the summer, Hugh rested up and recovered his nerves and his ideals simultaneously. He hardened his heart and decided that Helen must share her parents' fate, whatever it was. He planned the hair-raiser for the next Sunday, but in the middle of that week a returned foreign missionary called at the parsonage, campaigning for a new wing for his girls' school in Japan. Hugh asked him to speak in church the next

Sunday morning, thankful to postpone the carving knife for another seven days.

Hugh had asked this man to speak in all innocence, forgetful of the missionary convictions of W. F. Andrews. So, with no forebodings at all, on the first Sunday in July, he ushered the missionary, in a white necktie and gun-metal shoes, into a side chair of his pulpit. Calmly he introduced the missionary and let him talk an hour and a quarter on his new wing. He noticed, toward the middle of the address, that Andrews's pew was empty. He was positive that Andrews had been there at the beginning of the service. Perhaps Andrews had suffered one of his attacks of indigestion, or Asphodel, the corn-colored collie, was worse and they had called him. Hugh resolved he would telephone him when he reached the parsonage.

For the rest of the service he heard occasional words like "wood and stone" and "beautiful Christian Japanese girl." He was thinking of Stella's last letter about the baby. Helen was taking orange juice and was very fond of Agatha's four spaniels.

After the service was over, he and the grateful missionary reconnoitred in the parsonage ice box, and then the latter was maneuvered into an early

train. With a comfortable sigh, Hugh sat down in his study to write a long letter to Stella and enclose a life-size painting of a bottle in colors, to entrance the baby. But first he would telephone. It could not be Andrews that was indisposed, beause his voice came briskly enough over the wire, "Hello, Bloom!"

"Hello, Andrews! I saw your pew was empty the latter part of the service and I called up to see if you or Mrs. Andrews were ill."

"No, we're all well, thanks," Andrews said, smiling to himself. He was as eager for a fight as an unoccupied pugilist.

"Oh—Asphodel, eh?" came Hugh's confident voice.

"No—Asphodel is tiptop."

"Too bad you didn't stay," was the unperturbed reply. "It was an informing address."

If telephones were built so one could see one's tête-à-tête, Hugh would have seen Andrews's mouth open wide enough to let in a baked potato. Also, Andrews's eyes started out of his head, so that the little red veins around the bottom of the eyeball showed. But, as telephones are mercifully not built that way, Hugh only heard a cough, and then the words, staccato, "I'll be down in ten minutes."

As W. F. Andrews, being a man of big business, was, according to the best efficiency standards, rude and sharp and forceful in his conversation, Hugh thought that this was only one of his snappy and impressive decisions, and hung up the receiver without misgiving. He thought he might have time to at least draw the bottle before Andrews arrived. He was inking in the nipple when Andrews rang the door bell—Andrews, swollen and dilated and inflated with anger.

"Come on up to my study. There's a breeze up there and you will be cooler," Hugh said, hospitably, noticing that his guest was very red. Andrews's towering demeanor passed off as another manifestation of big business.

The caller followed his pastor upstairs, a wrathful, but also a puzzled, man. Either this Bloom was unbelievably innocent or unbelievably deep. Every other pastor in his experience had cowered when he had seen him in such a mood. They knew it paid to cower. Cowering put those marble tops on the tables, and brass beds in the rooms, and laid down the checkered kitchen linoleum. Meanwhile, Hugh was thinking that perhaps Andrews had come to more fully explain this morning's departure or talk over the new

tenor. They sat down in opposite chairs—Hugh in his desk chair, Andrews, in an uncomfortable wicker one that squawked.

"I came about that address to-day," Andrews said, in the tone in which one says "Boo!" to children.

"Nice old man," Hugh said, vaguely. "You missed a good talk. He is president of the girls' school at——"

"I don't care what he is!" Andrews growled, straining at the leash. "You know my opinion about Foreign Missions."

"That's so," Hugh said, with an awakening smile. "You don't like them."

"Don't like them!" Andrews returned, a little louder. "I don't believe in them!"

"Well—of course I could argue with you on that point," Hugh said, "but I believe everyone has a right to his own undisturbed opinion so long as he doesn't try to force it on others. Don't you?"

"I don't want to argue!" Andrews roared, feeling nonplused, but taking to roaring as the best way out. "I don't believe in Foreign Missions!"

Hugh knew that thunderous unreasonableness

is another sign of big business, so he did not reply directly, but cast about for an innocuous subject.

"My wife says the baby takes orange juice," he said, pleasantly, as if the news would disarm a Rocky Mountain lion.

Andrews stared at Hugh speechlessly for a couple of minutes. Then he squeaked way back into his wicker chair and looked at Hugh more and more earnestly, biting his thumb. Hugh thought that the hairs in Andrews's ears were getting longer and longer, and he did wish the man would cut them off. Whenever he looked at Andrews, he could think of nothing else. Personal peculiarities affected Hugh that way. Just now the hairs in Andrews's ears seemed to take on different aspects—now alert, now saucy, now beckoning, now repelling. There were a couple of hairs hanging out of his left nostril, too, and they made the end of Hugh's nose feel ticklish.

"I don't see your game," Andrews finally said, taking his thumb out of his teeth. "I must admit you are one too many for me."

"Eh?" said Hugh, startled.

"I might as well lay my cards on the table," the other continued. "I came here this afternoon to ask you why the devil you let that ass speak

to-day, when you know how I stand on Foreign Missions."

"But everyone in the church doesn't stand that way, does he?" Hugh asked, seeing his desk and Mr. Andrews rock about in a vicious circle.

"That doesn't matter, Bloom. I don't intend to have any foreign missionary talk in my church. Is that plain?"

"But, Brother Andrews," Hugh said, feeling calmer, "there is a membership of five hundred in this church. You are only one member!"

"Only one!" snorted Andrews, discovering a toothpick and wielding it bloodily. "Do you know that I give as much as all the others put together? I just about finance this church. You couldn't run along without me. Why shouldn't I dictate? Why shouldn't I have more to say than somebody who pays ten cents? The people all know I have what I want. I've done it for twenty years."

Hugh had no Stella to lay a restraining hand upon his bridle. He became righteously wrathful.

"Yes—and they have sat back and let you for twenty years, like a lot of jellyfish," he exploded. "The people have not cared how the church has been run and the ministers have been

cowards. The church ought to be a democracy. No one man ought to run it, not even the minister. The Lord has blessed you with wealth, Andrews, and you have tied a string to every one of the gifts you've given Him!"

"If you don't do as I say, I'll get out!" Andrews bellowed, who had been too angry to follow the argument. "I've resigned twice before, when they mutinied, and the whole damn Official Board crawled around to the house and begged me to come back. The church would go to pot without me."

Then they both grew incoherent, shouting and mumbling and interrupting each other.

"We should be sorry to see you go," Hugh said, finally, while Andrews was temporarily exhausted. "We could never forget all you have done. Every time we looked at the stained-glass angel window, we would remember it was your gift. But if you become a hindrance to the church, you cannot be tolerated. I could never yield to you in this. It's the principle at stake—of freedom—that Christ died for—that all the martyrs died for."

Hugh had roused Andrews by a different method than he had expected, but now the result was here, some of his speech was prepared. As

he spoke, his mind could see, constantly, the *Heathen Woman's Friend* on his mother's table in the Estey's Corners sitting room.

"See here, youngster," Andrews said, settling back again and trying to look pleasant, "all this has been too much for you at once, and it's gone to your head and made you forget yourself. Stop and think. You and I have been friends. Your wife is chummy with my wife. I'm not a devil. Just a man who wants what he pays for. The church likes to have me be king. They lick out of my hand. You don't catch them squawling about the principle of freedom. They are perfectly contented never to even smell a foreign missionary. The thing for you to do is to be contented. Keep quiet! You are an idealist. I know that. That's why you are such a good preacher. It's a very good policy for a preacher to be an idealist. Keep it up. But if you are an idealist, you ought to know what a necessary thing church unity is. For the sake of church unity, you ought to concede something."

"Concede!" Hugh exclaimed, growing wilder again. "I hate the word! How could I preach, how could I pray, if I knew that I had conceded something! You can't tie a man's hands and expect him to play the piano! You can't con-

cede one finger, if you're going to play the piano!"

"Other ministers have conceded and still had a very successful pastorate," Andrews said, excavating his ears with his forefingers. "Doctor Barber raised the membership by seventy and the budget by five hundred, and he was a good friend of mine."

"Well, I'm not Doctor Barber and I can't!" Hugh shouted, growing louder as his opponent grew softer. "I couldn't stand myself! I couldn't sleep or eat with myself! Your friends may have had outwardly very successful pastorates, but I know there must be a different quality to a man's ministry when he hasn't conceded, when he knows there is no variance between his life and his preaching."

"There isn't a soul in that church who doesn't think you and I have had a friendly understanding long ago. Yet you seem to do them good, and they respect you, don't they?"

Hugh groaned.

"No—I don't do any good," he said. "That must be the trouble. I've got to cut you off, Andrews, and let it be known. Then I'll see what I can do."

"You'll cut the membership of the church in

half. I've got my party and I'll fight you every day in the week. You'll cut the budget in quarter. That's where your ideals will get you to."

"God will help me."

"What kind of a report will you have to make next Conference time?" Andrews continued, ignoring God. "The bishop will say: 'What's this! Holy Spirit gone to the dogs? What's the matter with that fellow, Hugh Bloom?' Then I'll be there. I'll be right at his shoulder. I am a great friend of Bishop Brewster, and I'll say, 'Oh, Bloom—he meant well—but he antagonized people!' Then your career shuts up like a fan."

"I will speak to the bishop myself," Hugh said. "He will understand me."

"You poor thing!" Andrews replied, with a pitying leer. "The bishop is paid to understand me, and he either won't see you, or won't hear you if he does see you. What do you suppose my cuspidors are known all over the Conference for? Why, do you suppose, my andirons are known all over Methodism? Because I give, and everybody knows I ask a price for giving. Bishops are as easy as sealing wax to rule, because, when they get that far along, they know their plain duty and don't struggle. Most of 'em didn't use any lily methods getting to be bishops,

either. Bishop Brewster sent Christmas cards about 'good will toward men,' with his personal signature, to every minister in the Conference for sixteen years. The innocents back in the country thought they were the only ones who got a card and stuck it up on their mantels, tickled to death—and voted for their dear friend Brewster when he was put up for bishop. Money of mine, at the last minute, helped, too. I'm telling you this so you won't think you can go lay your head on Brewster's shoulder. You must remember the church is, first of all, a business. Religion is a by-product."

Hugh might have been a young girl hearing the brutal facts of life for the first time. He was thunderstruck about Brewster—that saintly old man with snowy beard and infirm step and collar and cuffs as white as the garments of those who have come up out of great tribulation!

How impressive he had been, last Conference, in the Memorial Service! He had opened the meeting by singing "Beulah Land," and closed with "In the Sweet By-and-By." Hugh remembered that he had felt a slight qualm at the sight of strong men singing those two simpering hymns, when there are so much nobler ones in the hymnal.

But Bishop Brewster had been perfection again, when he administered Communion to the ministers, which he referred to as a "love feast." Hugh thought to himself that he ought to have suspected a person who would call Communion a "love feast." At the time, Hugh had wished that the Conference would buy one of the sanitary new Communion sets with individual cups. Hugh had happened to kneel down at the altar rail next to an old country preacher who chewed tobacco.

After these profanities hustled through Hugh's brain, he wondered how he should speak to Andrews. Not once did he ever think of turning back from his purpose. One could not say that he had a struggle with the tempter, because his ideals were too deep set to be shaken to any struggle. Andrews might have been a dog, baying at the moon. But regret, grief, weariness and worry settled upon Hugh, and when he raised his head at last there were tears in his eyes.

"I'm sorry, Andrews. I always thought you were a Christian. I'll have to see what I can do alone—"

Hugh had meant to harangue, but Andrews rose, bristling like a startled terrier. He raised

his fist and brought it down on the desk with a bang that sent the papers slithering. He was not accustomed to being crossed. If he had been a small boy he would have screamed and kicked. But, as he was mature, he simply stamped down the stairs and almost pulled the front door through the sill after him.

When Hugh was left alone his first definite emotion was irritation against the missionary who had caused all this fuss. If this emphatic separation had to be, he wished it could have been caused by some brave act of his own, instead of inadvertently by a man who was after a girls' wing. Then, the next minute, he was glad it was only July and he had three quarters of a year before next Conference.

And then he went very slowly downstairs, and opened the ice box, and, on his knees before it, he drank the contents of a small bottle of his favorite ginger ale, which he had been saving to drink at a time when he missed Stella most.

CHAPTER XI

It was three weeks before Hugh had Stella—three brooding weeks. Andrews grimly attended church, and Hugh was circumspect. He was not ready for action yet. He must talk it over with Stella first. She knew so well how to temper righteousness with discretion. The only thing he did do was make a list, in his notebook, of the church members whom he considered to be the salt of the earth and who might be relied upon.

Agatha's farm was a place of a thousand trees, and tangled grass, and chickens, and long lines of blue-white clothes drying in the sun. It was a hearty, friendly farm, and everyone was glad to see Hugh. Agatha had a fat two-year-old baby of her own, who walked around Helen in admiring, wavy circles. Mary and Martha were tall and serious, and very unfamiliar, in white shirtwaists and brown serge skirts. They were teaching school. Peter was a clerk in a Kingston bank and wore loud waistcoats. Dorcas was pretty, and important as ever, and engaged. She had chosen a very meek

young man, and she ordered him about fiercely. Matthew and Mark had bought a farm nearby and were working it together. They both lived in constant dread that the other one would marry and spoil the partnership. Hugh drove over to see them, and found them two utter strangers to him, unless he conjured up their childhood. After he had reminisced with them, they were silent. They did not know about Hugh's work, nor he about theirs.

"A minister's life is one series of knowing people and then not knowing them, anyway," Hugh told Stella. "We get to know intimately a whole bunch of people in a parish. Sometimes we are even acquainted with their secret sins. And then we move away and they don't even exist for us any longer. Friendship has no continued plot in our life. It's a most incoherent kind of an existence."

"That's a fact," Stella said, nodding. "Think how important Sister Perth and that aunt used to be in Stone Valley! Now we don't even know whether they are alive or not. Now it's all Andrews and Z. Gilbert, and the rest."

Hugh and Stella spent most of that month talking. They sat on a flat rock, in the middle of a convenient clover meadow, and planned

their campaign against Andrews, like two young soldiers rubbing up armor and grinding lances. Sometimes, too, they wheeled Helen through the orchard and left her under an apple tree, while they roamed around, eating windfalls and endlessly talking. Old Balaam was permanently pastured in this quiet orchard, and he stumbled about with heavy feet, snuffing the sweet apples that lay like yellow bubbles in the grass.

Hugh sent a picture post-card to every member of his church, and wrote a letter to all the "shut-ins," not out of policy, but because he knew that every well-behaved minister spends half of his vacation remembering his parish. Notwithstanding these labors, Hugh thoroughly enjoyed this month's tranquillity and surcease. It seemed such fun not to go to church on Sundays, especially when he knew that the pulpit supplies at home were praying for him.

September second they returned to Mount Vincent. As they drove from the station in a cab, they saw that the hydrangeas were puffed into bloom on the tidy city lawns, as if some one under the earth were holding them up in a bouquet. The elephant's ears and red salvia, too, were in blossom, and some of the maple leaves were yellow. The oak tree in front of

the parsonage was bronzed already. The parsonage itself looked lonely, and rather weary about the shutters, and it smelled very dusty inside. But after they had opened the windows, and put Helen to bed, and eaten a supper of baker's bread and milk, they were completely at home again.

Hugh sat down at his desk as if he had never left it. He sighed and pulled out of his drawer a fresh package of writing paper, and slit the band about it. He was at work in earnest now. Before, he had been almost playing with the ministry. He had been anxious, indeed, to raise Stone Valley above their chickens. But saving souls had not been a matter of life and death to him. In this matter, however, his own skin, as well as the existence of Holy Spirit, were at stake.

It would be vastly harder work, but if he succeeded there would be a tangible satisfaction. If a church runs along smoothly, a minister can hardly tell how well he is succeeding. He has to presume that if the congregation and collections keep up, they are getting a sufficient quantity of religion. There is hardly any other way of telling. Tears and hand-clasps and testimonials are so uncertain. But now, for Hugh, every new

member meant a new subscription to Holy Spirit, and another unit nearer the goal of subscribing the budget without Andrews. This material satisfaction in winning souls seemed to Hugh rather wicked, but Stella assured him it was not.

"I think God Himself, if He has any sense," she said, "must have the same feeling. There can't help but be rejoicing in Heaven when one sinner repents and gives a thousand dollars to a Methodist orphanage or something."

The appearance of the foreign missionary in July had aroused no congregational comment, there had been so few present at that service. Virtually the entire Official Board had been on shore leave. So the reassembled congregation, in their right minds, were unprepared for the shock of the foreign-missionary sermon which Hugh preached on his first Sunday back. Stella could not go to church, because she could not leave Helen, but when she heard the hymn before the sermon, she left Helen asleep in her carriage and, with the aid of the household stepladder, climbed up on the sill of the blue-angel window of the church. She managed to hear most of Hugh's sermon, sitting on the narrow stone ledge, with her knees drawn up under her chin

and her ear against the stained glass. Once, the sexton, on the inside, unaware of her presence, popped open a section of the window just above her.

After the service, Hugh greeted the people cheerily and simply. Everybody shook hands with him in a kind of awestruck way, but there were no comments. The regular monthly meeting of the Official Board was scheduled for the next night, and by Monday noon Hugh had the resignation of William Frigg Andrews from its presidency, tendered to Stella by a footman. Hugh and Stella ate hardly anything for dinner Monday night, although Stella had Hugh's favorite dishes—even to grapefruit with a little well of grape juice in the center. Helen sat between them in her high chair and munched bread and butter, licking the butter off first. She had felt the family tension and refused to go to sleep, so her parents resigned themselves to her presence until such time as she should drop from exhaustion. An hour after dinner Stella made Hugh take a bath, to keep him from walking the floor.

At just eight o'clock, Hugh entered the Sunday School room where the Board meetings were always held, and found a large attendance. He called the meeting to order before any atmos-

phere had time to accumulate. The minutes were read and approved, and nobody listened. The Treasurer made his report and everybody seemed inclined to think him an honest man. The chairmen of committees hurried their reports, conscious of inattention. Hugh called for "old business" and the chairman of the House and Grounds Committee rose and said that this was the tenth time he had asked the Official Board to empower him to do something about the children roller-skating on the church walk. A policeman was immediately moved and seconded. Ordinarily, a policeman would have been laid on the table. Then Hugh said, "New business," and everyone leaned back and cleared his throat.

"Gentlemen," Hugh said, firmly, "I have in my hands the resignation of William Andrews as President of the Official Board. You all have some intimation of why he resigned. Mr. Andrews never made his missionary views very noticeable to me until last July when a foreign missionary spoke in our church. After he had spoken, Mr. Andrews came to the parsonage and brought his views very definitely to my attention, and asked that there be no more such propaganda in my pulpit. Of course, brethren, I could not agree to this. Christ's own command tells us to

go into all the world and preach the gospel to all peoples. I am one of Christ's ministers and must obey Him, and only Him. I told Mr. Andrews this, in effect, and he told me he would resign and let us struggle along as best we might.

"Now, brethren, it is your opportunity to run this church independently. Mr. Andrews has ruled over you for twenty years. Christ Himself compares His church to the parts of the body and especially says that no one member shall be greater than another. Mr. Andrews told me that he has twice resigned and you have asked him to come back. But if you could feel you had at your head a pastor who would not yield this principle at any price, who would be willing to shoulder the extra burden and responsibility, I am sure you would not ask Mr. Andrews to return on his own terms. You are all strong business men and you ought not to be afraid of emergencies. There are many people in this church who can afford to increase their subscriptions. There are many people in the city who would join the church—not exactly fashionable people—but good, dependable material. We have plenty of time before next Conference. We will emerge from the struggle more unified, more

self-respecting, unashamed to look God in the eye. . . ."

Hugh's speech went on to be impassioned. He spoke for a quarter of an hour. And when, damp with zeal, he finally concluded, assenting light glittered on at least half of the faces.

There followed argument "pro" and "con." The "pros" praised Hugh and talked about "look up, lift up," and quoted earnestly, though vaguely, from the Psalms. The "cons" congratulated themselves on having heads of adamant. They were men who like to say, "Now that's all very well, but let's get down to dollars and cents." They talked about notes and mortgages and said it couldn't be done. Mr. Andrews had given five thousand dollars, and no one could possibly raise that amount by Conference time. The "pros" replied that they could, with God's help, and the "cons" were stiff and silent, because they did not like to say anything against God's help. Then the "pros" asked if there could be a word of prayer, and for fifteen minutes they advised the Lord. Then the "cons" asked if there could be a moment's looking to the Lord in prayer, and they gave the Lord a few practical pointers.

Hugh dreaded the time when Mr. Leftig

would rise to address the chair. Mr. Leftig had purposely come in late, to make an impression. Mr. Leftig was a Methodist Jew, and he was very close to Mr. Andrews—almost as close as Tweedledum to Tweedledee. Mr. Leftig, then, had come to the meeting with a gullet full of Andrews's ideas. He was sitting alone on the front row, and Hugh wondered, as the battle raged, why he did not speak. At last he saw that Mr. Leftig, in his anxiety to get a point of vantage, had pranced to the front row and had sat down, without looking, in one of the Infants' Department chairs. He was quite small, and because of his elegant figure he fancied himself an Apollo, at least in miniature. The Infants' Department had lately acquired these new armchairs, large enough for two infants at once. Little Mr. Leftig exactly fitted. Once he had sat down, he was too self-conscious to change his seat immediately, thinking that when he stood to address the chair he would lightly and unobtrusively sit down again in another place. But, as he sat, that warm September night, his form began to flow around the spokes of the back and sides, and when it was time for him to speak he found, to his horror, that he could not possibly rise, unless he took his chair with him. An

Apollo, particularly a "con" Apollo, cannot effectively sway his audience with a new Infants' Department chair as a caudal appendage. Nor did Leftig wish to ask a fellow member to wrest his seat from him as he stood. So he seethed silently and wished all Methodism in Gehenna.

The "cons" saw that they were losing, and changed their tactics. Before, they had opposed hard-headedness to the "pros'" optimism, but that did not work very well because the "pros" kept quoting God, a Person whom the "cons" couldn't decently argue with. So the "cons" began to sob and moan on their own account, and talk about loyalty and unity. Things grew so terrible that Hugh felt as if he ought to call for a season of silent prayer, so as to give everyone a chance to blow his nose and arrange his necktie. But then Mr. Proctor, seeing a psychological moment, said, "I move we accept Mr. Andrews's resignation."

"Second it," some one said.

"Question," an exhausted "pro" murmured, but the rest did not want the question yet.

"Is there any discussion?" the chair asked, wearily, for his legs were stiff.

"I think we ought to say 'with regret,'" Mr. Shields said.

They were off again, hotter. Mr. Proctor could not be induced to amend his motion. So they passed Mr. Proctor's motion and then made another motion for the regret and passed that.

They could have added "with profoundest sorrow and anguish" to their acceptance of Mr. Andrews's resignation, for all Hugh cared. The acceptance was passed, and he suddenly realized how tired he was. His feet itched. He adjourned the meeting. The "cons" looked at their gold watches and lowered them into their pockets again, and left the room with the air of those who leave a corpse. The "pros" crowded around Hugh and promised all kinds of support. Hugh was too weary to understand them, but he thought they were a lot of good fellows.

Three quarters of an hour after the motion, he hurried across the back yard to Stella and found her trying to keep her mind on a magazine.

"Is she asleep?" Hugh whispered, as if it were tremendously important.

"Yes—at half past eight. How was it, Hugh?"

"We won. They accepted Andrews's resignation with regret."

"And now you're in for it! Oh, Hugh—I'm tickled to death!"

They hugged each other for five or ten minutes and Hugh jabbered about the meeting and nearly sent Stella into hysterics over the plight of Leftig. Then Stella fetched a box of the baby's graham crackers, and they ate those, side by side on the sofa. They talked about their courtship, about the latest styles, and the remarkableness of Helen—about anything but the church.

At twelve o'clock Andrews told his butler to extinguish the gate lights underneath the lions, and he went upstairs to his beautiful bed. From eight o'clock on, he had been sitting in the library, waiting for the Official Board.

CHAPTER XII

THAT fall and winter, Stella scarcely saw Hugh, except at meals. The baby learned to call him "man." Stella wheeled Helen every afternoon, sometimes past the Andrews estate, and it seemed to her as if the lions on the gate posts (which Helen called "doggie") were lifting their ferric paws to crush Hugh and herself. She felt so helpless. There was so little she could do, except be cheerful, and make the food digestible, and keep the darning up to date. What she wanted to do was rush out in the streets and seize people by the throats and make them subscribe to the budget. And with fingers itching for people's throats, she sat still in some rocking chair and laid patient little tucks in baby dresses and cross-stitched humorous little cats on baby bibs, or she hung wet, delicate handkerchiefs on the line, careful to put the pink-bordered ones together. She prayed, but it did not console her the way it consoled Hugh. Prayer, to her, was sending out a letter to a person whose exact address you don't know.

Some of her fashionable friends had deserted her, out of sympathy for Mrs. Andrews, so she did not have quite so much social life. She had plenty of time to worry when she sat alone at night, while Hugh was out canvassing, in a stillness so profound that the whispering of her silk dress, when she stirred, was very companionable. When Hugh came home late, after committee meetings, she had cocoa waiting for him, with a bit of sponge cake. When he was tired and irritable, she suppressed the desire to argue with him, and every wife will know what a sacrifice that was. She kept looking pretty, even in the middle of the night, and she waved her hair every day, although it sometimes took all the grit she had. She was earnestly economical (for who knew where they might be next year?) and she saved conscientious bits of string beans and mashed potato in the ice box until they molded away in innocuous desuetude. She left Helen, occasionally, in the care of an inexpensive orphan girl, and called on the new people moved to town, and, with Hugh, she went to dinner with newlyweds, which is the most boring thing in the world to do.

Hugh felt a great load of untruth on his soul from admiring the furniture of newlyweds, or

their babies whose heads were pineapple-shaped. But admiring their baby would often make a couple church members. Hugh learned what inconsequential reasons often kept people from being members. Perhaps they didn't like the contralto in the choir. Perhaps their little boy hadn't liked his Sunday School teacher, or he was a Methodist and she was a Baptist and they compromised by going nowhere. Or their clothes weren't good enough. Or maybe, when they came to church once, nobody had shaken hands with them. One woman had the notion that the Methodists believed in infant damnation, and, although Hugh assured her they did not, she would not believe him and refused to join. Hugh found people most sensitive on the point of pastoral attentions during illness. They thought the minister ought to know instinctively when they were sick, even though nobody told him. Smelling out sickness in his parish made Hugh positively haggard. He knew how important it was for him to call immediately. Whenever a new baby arrived, he had to enter upon a debauch of telephoning until the mother was up and around again.

"As for me," Stella snapped, "I wouldn't

want a minister within a mile if I was sick. I'd feel sure I was going to die."

When he admitted the restless, rather sheepish row of new members every Communion Sunday, either by letter, or from Probation, or on Confession of Faith, Hugh stressed that ritualistic question which says, "Will you contribute of your *earthly substance,* according to your ability, to the support of the gospel and the various benevolent enterprises of the church?" The Ladies' Aid had numberless socials and oyster suppers for the fund. The church kitchen took on a permanent smell of stew. In October the Men's Bible Class chartered the *Mary Powell,* and Mount Vincent excursioned up the Hudson River, with pigs in blankets and lemon pop, and paid the church for the privilege. Once, Hugh brought up reformed drunkards from Water Street Mission because the rich ladies would pay to cry over them. The Music Committee floated a series of concerts, and the Queen Esther Circle chaperoned a series of lectures. It rained on most of the series nights, but it did not matter much, as the people had been trapped into paying beforehand. The Epworth Leaguers, who were young and careless about cleaning up afterward, held so many cake sales in the church parlors

that the sexton demanded a raise in pay, on account of the crumbs.

But with all these ways and means, the sum mounted so slowly that Hugh felt openly older and there came a line between his eyes that never left. He was always having to pump enthusiasm on somebody who was feeling sure they would "never make it." Z. Gilbert, the Blood Builder magnate, who had very poor health, was especially in need of encouragement. But a pump does need to be replenished. When Hugh felt arid, he lay down on the sofa, and Stella rubbed his head and his twitching feet, and told him the funny stories she had read lately. Hugh indiscreetly told some one about these restful stories, and the some one said, severely, that Stella might better have been reading him something encouraging from Saint Paul. But Stella read Hugh poetry, besides, stirring, warlike poetry. He was growing less and less fond of the pretty poetry. His tired mind could not follow the intricate images. Moreover, it did not seem to matter so much that some branches looked nice against a moon, or that the sun shone daintily down on a daisy field.

"Do you remember," Stella asked him once, at such a time, "that afternoon you said you

wanted to write that the leaves on the trees were like the skirts of a ballet dancer?"

"Lord!" Hugh ejaculated. "Did I say that? It meant so much to me then—what everything looked like. Now I don't know what anything looks like but the parish front door bells. I don't have time. I notice one day as I go down the street that the leaves are red and there are bonfires in the gutters. The next day it seems there is snow on the sidewalks, and night comes early in the afternoon. I haven't any heart any more to imagine. I have to keep my mind so on sensible things. I'm a flower garden planted to vegetables."

"Your imagination is roosting around somewhere, Hugh. It will come back next year, when you and I aren't so busy."

"It's all I can do to get up two original sermons a Sunday and an address at prayer meeting, to say nothing about talks here and there and everywhere. A layman thinks all a minister has to do is get up two sermons for Sunday. A minister has to entice new members, and pacify old members, and confess old ladies, and marry and bury, and cheer the sick and the near sick, and tell the sexton that Mrs. Jones left her gloves in the church last Sunday, and rope babies in the

Cradle Roll, and chase boys off the church roof, and get subscriptions to the *Christian Advocate*. . . . What time does a minister have for God?"

"If we are doing our duty, I don't think we have to hunt far for Him," Stella said, in one of her rare flashes of faith.

It seemed as if that were so. For, at this busiest time, Hugh's sermons were growing more and more effective. Even the congregation realized it. Some of them had been amused icicles because they had thought his religion was paid by Andrews. But, now that they knew he was emancipated, they rallied to his courage and exposed some of the feelings which they had been keeping in cold storage for years.

Hugh's sermons did not always satisfy him, however. If he considered that he had preached well on Sunday morning, he came home ruddy and elated, and ate a good dinner. If his preaching were not up to his own standard, he came back to the parsonage without a word, and shut himself into his study without dinner. To be unsuccessful in anything was unbearable to Hugh. Stella noticed that. He could not bear to be less than his ideal—even in a sermon.

Stella often wondered what Hugh would have done if he had been unsuccessful in raising the

budget. But he was successful. There was a time, two weeks before Conference, after Stella had gone to bed and the night was far spent, when Hugh sat in his study and added the inexorable items and found that they amounted to the budget. It was all paid, then. He could face the Conference and the bishop with an unspoiled record.

It would have been a perfect moment for Hugh if he could have been sure that the Conference would say, "Well done, good and faithful servant." But it was bitter to think that he had endangered his future in the Christian ministry simply by being Christian. He remembered that in his brave college days he had said he would take his sword and run it right through the Eye of Methodism. Hugh had flourished his sword, but the Eye seemed to be inaccessible, like the head of the Cheshire cat which the Queen wished to amputate.

Hugh checked his addition, and laid his head down on his desk, intending to pray, but sleep came instead. Stella, waking in the early, foggy dawn, and fearful at finding herself alone, hurried to the study and found her husband snoring over the glorious total.

They were both very white and calm at break-

fast that morning. They were like Punch and Judy lying on the stage, after the show is over—crumpled—with strings loose and relaxed. Helen, who had eaten early, sat on the dining room floor and chattered to her Noah's Ark, snapping the legs off her animals with unnoticed abandon. For the family prayer, Hugh read, in a ghostly voice, while Stella looked down at her plate:

> "Why art thou cast down, O my soul?
> And why art thou disquieted within thee?
> Hope thou in God; for I shall yet praise Him
> For the help of his countenance."

He had hardly finished reading before a Mr. Judson rang the front-door bell. Judson was not a member of any church, and, although he was a good friend of the Blooms', Hugh could never induce him to join. He always said that he was too fat to get through the strait gate.

"Jerusalem, man!" Mr. Judson said, when he saw Hugh, "you look peaked. Been working too hard, eh?"

"Up late last night," Hugh replied, quietly. "Have you come to tell me that you are going to join the church?"

They both laughed, because this was an old joke.

"No—but I have come to give you a thousand dollars," Judson said, when he had ceased chuckling and slapping his big knees.

"Wh-a-t?" Hugh asked, shaking.

"Ha! Ha! Ha!" laughed Mr. Judson, very pleased and embarrassed. "Look at your face! Didn't you think I was worth a thousand dollars?"

"But why—"

"This is why. I've watched you fighting. I know a plucky soldier of the Church Militant when I see one, even if I don't belong. I just couldn't keep the thousand back. I hope it will bring the budget up to the mark. I didn't think you could possibly make it without. Jumping devils! I couldn't see you fail!"

Mr. Judson went into a fit of confused coughing.

Hugh could not bring himself to tell Mr. Judson that he had made the budget without. That would take away some of his pleasure, and no one would have had the heart to disappoint Mr. Judson, glowing with goodness and shaking with shy laughter. So Hugh simply sat and beamed, looking rather like a mirthful specter. After all, the extra thousand would be a nice green feather in Hugh's cap at Conference. He knew

that Stella, who was at that moment listening behind the portières, would be the one to moan that the extra thousand had not come earlier, and saved those last tense efforts.

But in spite of the extra thousand, it was a nervous moment, a fortnight later, when Hugh started off for Conference. When he stood in the front hall with his little bag, Stella could not think of anything cheerful to say, so she rubbed her nose against a button on Hugh's vest and said, "Now don't get run over." The next moment he was out of sight around the corner. In ten days they would know whether they would stay in this parish or move into the bowels of the earth. For that would be where they must move, if they were defeated. No good church would take a man with a reputation for sundering parishes. Stella feared Andrews. She had seen him go by the house often, his eyes upon the sidewalk. She had seen Mrs. Andrews drive past—herself and her footman in faultless profile. She knew how unmerciful the rich are, because they never expect to have to obtain mercy.

When Hugh reached Conference, he zealously engaged in all the Conference affairs, to keep himself from harrowing speculations. Evenings,

he rearranged his bureau drawers in his cheap hotel, now putting the striped handkerchief on top, and now the initialed one. He wrote witty letters to Stella on the hotel stationery. He sent a post-card of a New York Central engine to Helen with the inscription: "This is what took papa to the big city. You shall come some day, if you are a good girl." Late afternoons, at Stella's request, he toured toy shops for a ball that looked like an orange, so Helen would not cry for the table oranges.

At first his welcome among the Conference ministers had been all smiles. The popular young preacher at rich Mount Vincent ought to be smiled upon. But, as the days passed, he saw that the ministers were beginning to whisper behind their hands, and look at him curiously.

"Some of Andrews's propaganda," he reflected, and then tried to be cheerful and think, "I have my propaganda, too."

Z. Gilbert, the Blood Builder, had promised to stand by Hugh, and a committee, composed of him and six others, was going to obtain the bishop's ear at a time when that ear was convenient. But the committee had never thought of circulating stories in the Conference. The

devil always seems to be more resourceful than the righteous.

On the day before the last Hugh felt as if all his teeth were loose when Z. Gilbert sidled up to him and whispered, "We have an appointment with Brewster at eleven." During that awful hour between eleven and twelve Hugh sat in the Conference session, listening to an address by somebody or other. He never knew, afterward, what the address had been about. Now and then he saw the men about him applaud.

To distract his mind, Hugh tried to pick out the different types of minister in the audience. There were mostly old men right around him, who sucked their teeth when they grew excited—old men in white neckties, and shoes with elastic sides which the irreverent called "evangelastics." Hugh could imagine their old wives darning and brushing these men to come to Conference. Their clothes resembled the gospel armor of the hymn—"each piece put on with prayer."

There were some younger preachers, taking notes. These men, whose minds went dry, like wells connected with no living spring, came to Conference and pumped themselves full of information at these addresses, and then went home to their congregations and tried to make the sup-

ply spread over a year. These parched pastors could not replenish themselves unless information were literally poured down their throats. Like caged canaries, they were no good turned loose to hunt their own sustenance.

They were little worse than the preachers who, during the week, read a new book or magazine, and then, on Sunday, preached what passed for a sermon, mouthing words with deceiving facility. Again, still other ministers did not read anything so up-to-date as a magazine. Given a trusty Concordance of the Bible, and the Good Book itself, their library was formed. Hugh recollected that his father always had to build extra bookshelves in every parsonage he inhabited, which became a lot of accusing space for the next man. The minister who followed Daniel at Genoa had asked permission of the Ladies' Aid to use the extra bookcases as china closets.

But worse than these ministerial types mentioned, Hugh hated the gushing type of pastor who was always seeing sermons in stones, and books in the running brooks. Such a man, on a walk, could not even see a beetle without exclaiming, "Look! There's a thought for a sermon!"

There were no really successful preachers in

any of the auditorium seats. They never went to the addresses. They were always booming around in the corridors, or attending committee meetings, or eating. They ate expensively four or five times a day, and they treated the bishop. They went everywhere in groups, and reserved big round tables in hotels. They never thought of attending Conference—except perhaps at its opening and closing—when they sat in rotund rows and sang, and read the responses very loudly, as if they were in their own pulpits.

Hugh gritted his teeth as he thought of the committee with the Bishop. He wished that he could sit inside of Z. Gilbert's larynx and do his speaking for him. Z. Gilbert was a well-meaning fellow, but his Adam's apple was not well oiled. It creaked. An Adam's apple should be especially greasy to talk to a bishop. Hugh wondered what he himself would say if the bishop should call him for an interview. He reviewed his theological opinions to see if he really were a Methodist. If the committee obtained no satisfaction from Brewster, Hugh resolved he would see the bishop himself. But if the committee reported favorable results, Hugh thought it would be well to leave Brewster alone to set, like a cake with a fresh boiled icing.

Hugh saw that the address was over, and he went out into the corridor, odorous of rubber matting. At the end of it he spied the committee, all talking at once, as men do after an interview when they have not said half they intended.

"You don't need to convince *me,*" Percy Fee, the Mouth Wash man, was saying, as Hugh came near. "Tell that to the bishop. Why didn't you tell him that when you were in there?"

"How was it?" Hugh asked.

"You couldn't tell," Gilbert replied, with a disgusted mouth. "He's a yes-and-no kind of a man. He just sat and stroked his whiskers until I wanted to pull 'em out."

"We talked soft to him and talked hard to him, but nothing seemed to have any effect," Fee said, disconsolately. "He sort of kept his lids down over his eyes and moved his feet. That was all he did."

"What did he say?" Hugh asked Gilbert, feeling that the temperature was zero.

"Nothing—much. Nothing you could quote. He's canny. I mentioned my Blood Builder to him, and he said he had taken it, and after that we got along a little better. Percy, here, got so eloquent on the subject of you, that I thought

he was going to cry, but Brewster would hardly treat him decent till he dragged in his Mouth Wash."

"He said," broke in McClellan, a third committee member, "that he would do his best. But we must remember a bishop's position was very delicate."

Hugh soon left them in their exclamatory whorl, and walked slowly toward his hotel. Another address, back at Conference, was gathering its recruits through the glass doors of the auditorium. But Hugh could not have listened to anything. He bought a banana at a fruit stand and almost ate it in the street, he was so miserably unconscious of conventions.

The day was warm for April, and his little hotel room was sticky and smelled of hotel soap. The towels on the washstand were all hung awry, and when Hugh went there to wash his hands after the banana, he found a film of dust on the water in the big white pitcher. Hugh drew the one straight chair up to the window and sat down. Below, he could see the moving black squares that were carriage tops, drawn by horses that had shrunk to semicolons. The people on the street were periods, and the lamp posts were exclamation points. Hugh was amused at this

conceit and tried to find something that looked like a comma, but his mind relapsed to his problem before he looked long.

That the bishop had been impressed by the nationally known businesses of Gilbert and Fee was a good omen. But that was all the good he could gather from the disjointed pieces of interview. Hugh almost had a moment of compassion for Brewster, menaced, on the one hand, by cuspidors, and, on the other, by Blood Builder and Mouth Wash. Hugh could easily see that cuspidors were heavier weapons. He decided he would go and see the bishop at his house, after dinner. The man must have a spark of religion in him. He would at least listen. Until then, what? It was, by now, four o'clock in the afternoon. He took off his shoes and lay down on his bed. But his mind thought faster there than up by the window. It was frightening to think so fast, and, besides, he was ruining his trousers. He rose, and washed, and shaved, and dressed himself, deliberately. There was one thing he could not do. He could not write to Stella—not until he was certain. He sat down again, opened his satchel, and searched for the notes of his next Sunday's sermon, which he had brought along. If he won out, the text was to

be, "Fear not, little flock, it is the Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." If—if the other happened, the text would be, "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith." He looked earnestly at his hieroglyphics for full five minutes, but his heart was wrenched with anxiety, and in the top of his brain was the bellowed chant, "A bishop's position is delicate—a bishop's position is delicate."

He stuffed the papers back into the side pocket of his satchel and his aimless hand found the little bag of russet apples which Stella had counseled him to bring. He rubbed one of the apples on his sleeve and ate it slowly—his legs twisted about the front legs of the chair. It slowly grew to be six, and at last he could decently go to dinner.

The brightness of the hotel dining room was blinding and somehow made him lonely. It was more companionable in the dark. He saw groups of ministerial backs at small tables, and one long table especially made up for the unattached wanderers, at which two or three were already gathered together, excavating grape fruit, with their napkins tucked into their collars. At this table Hugh sat down, and found

himself surrounded by a discussion on the nature of Hell. One could never have guessed what they were talking about from their placid behavior.

"Hell," said one calm, corpulent man, as he reached for the salt and pepper, "is consuming flame."

Hugh was almost inclined to hope so, provided he could have some say as to its inmates. He was silent at the table, which soon finished Hell and took up the devil. The devil seemed a little closer home to the ministers, and they grew more heated about him. One divine, who believed firmly in what he called a "personal devil," found in the hottest part of his argument that the waiter had not vouchsafed a spoon to stir the gravy with. So, in order to amalgamate its contents, he gave the gravy boat a rotary motion with his explanatory hand and brown breakers dashed high over the brim. Hugh ate two bites of a pork chop, and two more of a boiled potato, and shudderingly consumed the whole of an uninviting enamel door knob of vanilla ice cream.

Then he went upstairs again, seeing that the lobby was thick with theology. He sat in his chair, wrestling with a desire to call Stella by long distance. He knew he would only worry her if he called, but, he reflected, what do we

love each other for if we can't worry each other when we want to? He went downstairs to the booth and learned that the toll was twenty-five cents to Mount Vincent. He opened his wallet and found that he had just enough money to pay his hotel bill and get home—and fifteen cents besides. He wished he had not bought that banana. He bit his lip and went out of the booth and into the street. It seemed to him as if everyone were walking in twos. No one was alone, like himself, with such a burden of conversation upon his soul.

It was three miles to the bishop's. Brewster did not live near any cheap hotel. When Hugh saw the house his heart jumped, because almost every window was lighted. Brewster must be at home, then. He gave the cap and apron that opened the door his card, and then repented as soon as she was gone. He thought that probably Stella would have advised him to leave his identity as a pleasant surprise to the bishop, and simply introduce himself to the cap and apron as a "brother in the Lord." Before he had time for much regret, the maid was back with the news that the bishop was, indeed, in a delicate position.

"Bishop Brewster has retired, sir."

"Oh dear me!" exclaimed Hugh, involunta-

rily. "Won't you ask him—if he isn't too much retired—if I can't see him just the same? It's very important. I won't keep him."

"I'll see, sir."

Hugh stared wretchedly into the front hall until the inexorable envoy came back.

"I'm sorry sir," she said. "The bishop is at his prayers and cannot be disturbed."

Hugh was the last man to want to come between the bishop and his God. As he went down the steps he had a mental vision of the genuflected, apostolic pajamas. He fancied he heard Brewster bawling through the bedroom door to the cap and apron. People interrupted in their prayers are always cross. Then he looked back at the lighted windows and wondered if the bishop were at his prayers as some office boys are at their grandmother's funeral.

There was nothing to do but walk the three miles back to the hotel. He loitered, and tried to study the shop windows, and the signs, and the pictures in the photographers' cases. When he passed the hotel telephone booth he counted his money over again and went up to his room. Without undressing, he knelt down by his bed and laid his cheek against the counterpane as if it had been Stella's cheek. He passed the

night praying and sleeping alternately, and, about half past four, he took off his clothes and crawled between the sheets.

He woke at eight, feeling, as he expressed it, like a "boiled owl." He hardly dared to look at himself in the mirror. Another man might have taken a devil-may-care attitude toward his fate, but everything in his life mattered too much to Hugh.

He found that a gloom had settled even upon the Conference session—a lowering mist, emanating from the poorer preachers, to whom this was *dies iræ*. The successful preachers were more brisk than ever. As Hugh went into the morning meeting he saw, by the double doors, old Peter Reid—a retired, or, as they tenderly called them in those days, a "worn-out preacher." He had held country charges near Hugh's father and many a time had his white nag with the docked tail—Bella—stood at the Bloom hitching post. When he had been retired, and his pension from the Worn-out Preachers' Fund had been unable to support him, he and his wife had taken to serving dinners. They were serving the final dinner downstairs to-day in the Primary Department. This Conference time, Peter had been a kind of errand boy, and had carried important

papers for the bishop and made his legs very useful. He was deemed a harmless chap, who did not know beans when the bag was open. Hugh stopped to speak to this old fellow, who was too touchingly glad to be noticed. Peter asked all about the Bloom family, and Hugh told him what had become of Luke and John and Mary and Martha and Matthew and Agatha. Hugh thought he had spoken with suave assurance, hiding his worry, but that noon, at dinner, old Peter touched him on the arm as he tremblingly guided Hugh's soup past his left ear.

"Could I see you a moment after dinner, sir? I'll be in the kitchen."

It made Hugh feel sick at heart to see old Peter, dealing out the soup—hurried, and anxious, and eager—while the unheeding conversation clattered about him. After he had served them all so carefully, they let him ask the blessing as a special favor, and he stood at the head of the table, his hands folded and a napkin over his arm. He prayed for the Conference, and he thanked the Lord for his abundant loving-kindness toward him, Peter Reid. Amen.

After dinner, Hugh found Peter and his wife doing the dishes. His wife was wearing an expression which indicated that she was not bub-

bling over with thankfulness to the Lord. Hugh thought that old Peter must have a hard time with her. As soon as Peter saw Hugh, he set down the plate he was wiping, smothered in its towel, and drew Hugh just outside the kitchen door, behind the garbage pail.

"I see you're worried, sir," Peter said.

"Don't call me 'sir'," Hugh said, feeling himself lose control at this kindly perception.

"Excuse me—sir—but I call everyone 'sir,' since I took to dinners. We must speak quick. I know. You are worried about your appointment. You don't know whether you are going back or not. That's the way I used to be. The hours Mamie and I wrestled in prayer to ask the Lord to call us higher! I used to hope they wouldn't put us lower, and then I thought sometime—they would surprise us with a good place. But it wasn't to be. Your father and I were put in the little places. I figure that, in all, I lost ten years of my life with worrying about my next appointment. You mustn't start in, my boy. Now I know where the bishop keeps his appointment list. He made it out final this morning. He's out to the Waldorf to lunch now, and, if I know him, he won't be back in an hour. I'll sneak up and get it and let you see it. Bless

me! you look forty years old, and aging every minute!"

"But you might get caught!" Hugh said, while a great, boiling wave of excitement broke over his chest.

"Pshaw! Nobody minds what old Peter does. I've seen that. I want to do something for your father's son. Your father used to come preach in my pulpit for charity, and I haven't forgotten the time he gave me fifteen dollars and seventy-five cents when I couldn't pay him back."

Hugh could not reply. There had been times before when he had been shown kindness on his father's account. His father's name had been for him an "open sesame" to many hearts. He had a moment's flashing perception of how worth while it is to be noble—if only for your children and your children's children. Before he could speak, Mrs. Peter Reid bore down upon them reprovingly, and majestically deposited the garbage with the air of a Vestal Virgin at the Sacred Fire.

"Meet me downstairs in the cellar lavatory," Peter whispered. "It's the only place. Go right on down and I'll come in a moment."

He sped out through the kitchen, and Hugh followed, slowly. He found the door leading

to the cellar, and descended into blackness. Once he thought he heard the sexton, and skipped and hid behind the furnace. He did not question the righteousness of his actions in seeing the paper, any more than a drowning man has scruples about snatching at somebody else's straw. He went into the lavatory and stood, breathing heavily, his hand against the cold marble wall, until he heard Peter's rocking-horse gait. Peter came in, crouching, with a theatrical air. It was glorious to him to be so necessary. As soon as he closed and locked the door, he laid his ear dramatically against it, and then opened his coat and drew out some typewritten sheets.

"Here," he panted. "Nobody saw me. Quick."

The appointments were listed alphabetically by the name of the church. It was a long way to the M's. They both almost lost their breath before they could get there. They turned over several shaking sheets, and, at last, there it was:

"Mount Vincent—Hugh Wesley Bloom—returned."

Hugh read the wonderful words twice, and then he leaned against the marble wall and sobbed.

"Are you glad or are you sorry?" asked old Peter, anxiously.

"Glad," Hugh said, half laughing at Peter's screwed-up face. "It's just the relief."

"I know," Peter said. "I cried when they sent me back to Durham."

The Official Minutes of the Conference said that after Bishop Brewster read the appointments at the afternoon session, the Doxology was sung. Hugh sat with his committee during that reading and joined in the Doxology. The committee marveled at his composure. He borrowed ten cents from Z. Gilbert and telephoned Stella.

He threw away the agitated sermon notes he had in his satchel. The next Sunday he preached from a new text: "Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid."

Selah.

CHAPTER XIII

HUGH was immensely popular during the next three years at Mount Vincent. A man is always popular when he has fought and come out first —dead or alive. The beginning of the third year they raised his salary two hundred dollars, at which Stella sniffed, but then, loyal wives always do sniff at their husbands' raises.

At the end of the third year Hugh was called to a church in a large manufacturing town, at a salary of twenty-five hundred. It was a church composed of comfortable bourgeois, whose women were at home in shirtwaists and skirts and high-laced shoes, and whose men had no shame about their suspenders. But it had a much larger membership than Mount Vincent, and the salary looked stupendous, so Hugh accepted. He felt, moreover, like a frog that has hopped long enough in one small puddle. He wanted something bigger. The Mount Vincent Official Board behaved as if they could never bear up under the parting, and gave Hugh a tasty plated tea set, with "Presented by the Mount

Vincent Methodist Episcopal Church" engraved in script across the big, round, beaded tray. The Ladies' Aid presented Stella with a gold breast-pin, set with a ruby, and the minister and his wife spent their last three Mount Vincent weeks in an agony of gratitude.

Some one gave Helen a tortoise-shell cat at the last minute, and she carried it to the new parsonage, wailing in a crate. There was no lawn and no luxury about their new home in the city of Smollett. It was situated in the heart of the town, between the post office and a drug store, directly opposite the church. Hugh said he was glad of the post office, because of the accessibility of stamps, and Stella said she was glad of the drug store, because of talcum powder and white vaseline. But neither one rejoiced over the street-car line. Obliquely opposite them was a boarding house, with a gilded stump in the front yard, which bore a gilded sign, "The Central." Smollett was very fond of gilt. There was a gilt chandelier in every room in the parsonage, and dog and cat pictures in curly gilt frames, reverently inclosed in glass cases. There were, also, brussels carpets, wall paper with whole landscapes on it, two green marble fireplaces, and one, resonant, tin tub.

"I wonder if we would ever get to a parsonage that was furnished in perfect taste," Hugh mused.

"No," Stella replied, "because people of taste think that they are too high and mighty to serve on parsonage committees."

There was a hardware salesman who had served on the Parsonage Committee, and three months after Hugh moved to Smollett this man died. One smothering July morning Hugh hurried back to the parsonage after two hours spent at his deathbed. Hugh's handkerchief was soggy with moisture, and it seemed to him that he had never been so hot. As he had knelt in prayer, close to the salesman's motionless, seersucker counterpane, he had felt as if the whole, soundless, sick room were at some grim boiling point. He sensed a subterranean stirring beneath his knees, as if the room were the inside of a hot kettle. After his prayer, he had sat by the bed and held the sick man's hand, and the great, coarse pattern of the wall paper had quivered before his eyes, as if seen through a shifting cloud of steam.

That indicated Hugh was very tired indeed. He was thinking, as he trudged, of a long, cold glass of water, and the chintz-covered chair in

the coolest corner of his house—and silence. As he neared home he saw Stella standing by the upper study window. She was wearing a green cotton gown with a small round neck and puffed sleeves. Hugh relaxed at the sight of her. She was reading a letter. Evidently the morning mail had just arrived. Hugh saw the blue postman warbling just three houses down.

Hugh went up the parsonage flight of stairs slowly. At the top he released a loud "Whoosh!" to relieve his own feelings and to greet Stella. But no sound came from the study. Alarmed, Hugh hurried inside and saw his wife still reading the letter, with an ominous look.

"Hello!" he said, with an effort to be harmless. He thought that he better not risk getting the drink of water just then.

"Look!" Stella said, with a gulp. "Look what just came."

It was a newsy letter from a Mount Vincent parishioner. It said that Archibald, the new minister, had become reconciled to Andrews and that Andrews had given the church a handsome echo organ, to celebrate. He had also subscribed six thousand dollars to the budget. The Woman's Foreign Missionary Society had practically gone out of existence.

"Three months," Hugh said, sighing, "and they are back where they were before I went there. They've decided to serve Mammon."

"Damn!" Stella said, trembling.

"I'm sorry for their sakes. I wish they could have kept it up," Hugh continued, gently. He suddenly felt more tired than ever, and much thirstier, and he remembered the long, cold drink he had promised himself, and started for the door.

"Is that all you are going to say?" Stella demanded. "I've just begun to talk. I'm mad through and through. Look at all you did, Hugh! Look at the way you slaved! Look at the way I sat there alone, night after night, while you were out chasing people!"

"If I had known it was going to end this way, I wouldn't have done any differently," Hugh replied, after a long, reflective moment. "I did it for my own sake as well as theirs. Ideals are really selfish things. They do the most good to the people who have them."

"Oh, stop, Hugh!" Stella cried, in a rapture of exasperation. "Be human. That death and this heat have taken all your fight away. You know that you have worn yourself out for nothing. You know that Mount Vincent hasn't

cared for what you've done any more than for—"

"For knocking down a child's pile of blocks," Hugh said, growing restive. "It makes me tired out to think of it. Don't think that I don't care. But I guess I must be a kind of an ostrich, Stella. When something unpleasant happens, I always try to hide my head in something else and not think about it."

"You ought to have put all that energy into your writing," Stella said, glaring at a tiny, adventurous ant on the window sill, as if he were Mr. Andrews.

"Yes, I ought to have written more," Hugh replied, in a roused tone.

"If you hadn't gone into the ministry, you might have been famous by now. At least you wouldn't have wasted a good five years of your youth on something which has come to nothing."

"It depends on what you mean by nothing. If I kept my own honor and integrity—is that nothing?"

Stella knew that there was a way to answer Hugh adequately, but she could not think of it in time, and she was a little embarrassed.

"You don't care about me," she wailed, hop-

ping to this astonishing statement for refuge. "I'm tired of being a minister's wife!"

Exclamations and questions jostled one another in Hugh's mind to such an extent that he could say nothing at all. His thoughts were a crowd of people, fighting for exit through a narrow door.

"It's hard for me," Stella said, noisily. "I have to do so many things I don't like that it uses up all my goodness, and I have to have a reaction every once in a while. I've had my reactions when you were out, before. Don't you suppose I hate adapting myself to people all the time? In Stone Valley, I had to be a peasant. In Mount Vincent, I was a society lady. And now, here I am trying to please these—these females. It makes me feel like a—like a chameleon. I never have any personality of my own. Sometimes I don't know whether there is anything left of me or not. I am just that revolting type of person known as a 'minister's wife.' Why must ministers' wives be types? No one expects a garbage man's wife to behave like a garbage man! Bankers' wives and vice-presidents' wives can do as they please. But a minister's wife has to conform to some impossible standard, or she ruins her husband's career!"

"Poor Stella!" Hugh said, overwhelmed.

Stella was galloping along paths which she had ridden secretly, before. She was not to be bridled.

"You have God and your ideals to comfort you," she continued, "but I haven't. Ideals have never cheered me any, and God has been apt to make me gloomy. I have done things because I love you. I would do anything to help you—most of the time. But now—when I read this letter—it all seemed so futile—"

Stella was pacing the room with staccato heels. Hugh began to pace, too, and they passed and repassed each other without looking up.

"You are still young," Stella said. "I think you ought to leave the ministry."

"What could I do? What could I do?" Hugh muttered, helplessly, swept along in the rapid current of her revolt.

"Do! Write!"

"But suppose I couldn't sell my poems? Where would our food be, and Helen's dresses, and—"

"Well, then, go into some other business that would give you time to write after hours. There's banks, for instance. They close at three."

Hugh thought that Stella must be ill. Such

a rash of impracticability had broken out over her.

"Getting a position isn't as easy as you think," he said, patiently. "But even if I could get a new one—ought I to give up the ministry, when I have begun it, just because everything doesn't go right? I have put—"

"Hugh! Don't you dare quote that Bible verse about putting your hand to the plow and not turning back. That verse has been the excuse for more people's stubbornness—"

"How did you know I was going to say that? You always know what I am going to say. But you don't know how deep all those things—ideals, and verses, for instance—are planted in me. I have heard them ever since I was born. I couldn't get out of them—or the ministry—any more than I could get out of my skin."

"Oh, Hugh! I'm not nearly so good as you, but I am more sensible! Of course you could get out of the ministry. All you would have to do would be to—do it!"

"It isn't so simple as that. Besides, I thought some of these things over when I decided on the ministry. The reasons that made me join then are just as strong now. Don't you suppose that it comforts me to think I am carrying on

the family tradition? Father used to sit with that huge, purple Bible, after breakfast, and read us a Bible story, and we children sat and listened just as Helen listens to 'Red Riding Hood.' And then he used to pray for our futures—and for one minister among us."

Stella was beginning to feel the recuperative effects of her emotional excursion, and she began, contritely, to wipe the perspiration from Hugh's taut face with her crisp handkerchief. Anyway, she had found out long ago that there was no use arguing with Hugh when he began to reminisce. She had many comfortable and refreshing things to say, and she told Hugh that she liked Smollett, and enjoyed being a chameleon. In a day, she would forget this conversation. Not so with Hugh. The thought of it would stay with him, and pounce upon him at times —just as he was going asleep—or perhaps just as he was happiest somewhere. Many a time he would wonder if God would hold him responsible for hiding his one literary talent away in a napkin for awhile. And many a time he would ask himself what was the use of slashing away, like Saint George, at an invulnerable dragon?

Hugh sank, at Stella's urging, into the chintz-

covered chair which he had anticipated, and drew off his heavy shoes. At that moment the door bell rang. Stella fluttered her fingers over her hair and disappeared. Hugh groaned, and forced his shoes on again. Then he pulled down his vest and coughed. A good, deep cough was always very composing to him. Stella reappeared.

"Missis Slorah!" she hissed, with expression.

"Again?"

"Yes—I just know she's going to ask for more money. You know the last time she was here and wanted you to explain that Bible passage to her, she asked for a raise of a quarter a week. Don't you give her any more, no matter what she says. A dollar and a half is preposterous for laundry work."

Mrs. Slorah was proud of the fact that she had not always been a washerwoman, but had risen in school as far as the eighth grade, and then had become the wife and, later, the widow, of an improvident bricklayer. But for eighteen years she had maintained her present occupation. She had a son, Silas, nineteen years old, who caused his mother much worry because he was fond of music and stayed out late at night. Hugh was always a little afraid of Mrs. Slorah. She

was so tensely pious. She never relaxed for a moment, and Hugh had caught her at all sorts of moments—even over her washtub in a steaming welter of hot clothes. Hugh wondered if she ever secretly joked about God. He had known, for a long time, that a breathless, bold little joke about God is great fun.

"Good morning, Mrs. Slorah," Hugh said, uneasily. He was conscious of not feeling pious.

"God be with you, Reverend," old Mrs. Slorah said, elegantly, with a curtsy that was a species of squat.

Hugh realized that he was yearning fiercely to say something flippant. Even a quotation from Longfellow would have terrified Mrs. Slorah and turned her a satisfactory blue. She distrusted poetry. After her curtsy, she sat down in the most torturous parlor chair, with her gloved hands linked in her black lap.

"I trust you are well," Hugh said, feebly, drawing a chair close.

"God has kept us well, praise His name," Mrs. Slorah replied, unbuttoning her cotton gloves with great dignity and laying them across her lap like two limp corpses. Then she continued, "It's about Silas I've come to tell you."

"Silas. . . . Has he been staying out late again, or has he been playing Chopin's waltzes?"

"No, Reverend. He has been in every night for a month. It's that I have come to say. He's decided to be a minister."

Mrs. Slorah settled back in her chair, her face an impressive oblong.

"A minister!" Hugh exclaimed, feeling his blood bubbling cool all along his limbs.

"Silas has always had a lustful desire to be a music man, Reverend. He can play, too. He's played 'Before Jehovah's awful throne' for an hour at a time to please me. He used to play 'My God, how wonderful Thou art,' when I was ironing box pleats, because they tried my patience so. If I had been able to keep him on hymns or even sacred songs, Reverend, I would have been easy in my mind. But when I was off collecting my washings he would sly in some of his Brahms, or his ungodly Frenchmen. He always knew I wanted him to be a minister, Reverend. Many times I have prayed for that at the scrubbing board until I've rubbed the buttons off the clothes, forgetting where I was. I cut things about ministers out of the newspapers and put them on his pillow. But he never would say yes, Reverend, until you came."

"Until I came!"

"Yes, Reverend, I made him come with me that first night you preached, promising him a raisin cake as a treat. He went home very restless, and always came with me to church, after that. He sat on the back seat and listened to what you said with his hands icy cold. We used to talk your discourse over when we got home, and I slipped in bits of good Scripture, here and there.

" 'I would say yes, mother, if it weren't for my talent,' he said to me, ever so often. He knew he had talent because some high-up man told him so. Well—I talked and prayed him out of it. I told him about the wicked life music men lead, Reverend. They even give Sunday concerts. And more than my words, Silas was carried away by what you preached.

" 'Reverend Bloom is such a fine man, mother,' he said to me, 'I'd like to be like him.'

"So last night he told me he had decided, and he burned his Brahms."

Mrs. Slorah stopped and began to use a little black handkerchief. Hugh sat dumb. He noticed how illumined Mrs. Slorah looked at that moment—how glorified.

"If I could tell you, Reverend," she went on,

"what that means to me! It's the reward for eighteen years of laundry. I was very proud when Martin was alive, and washing and ironing has been a cross to me, especially the box pleats. I said Scripture to keep my courage up. Silas laughs and says I say a Bible verse like men take a swig of whisky."

Hugh felt like a frozen winter brook—a smooth, patterned surface—but, beneath, relentless, running, black water. He decided that he must not show Mrs. Slorah the black water. There would be no use. She would not believe it.

"But—are you sure your son will be happy?" something forced him to ask, in a frail voice, in spite of his decision. "Maybe he will wish all his life that he had been a musician."

Shocked and distressed, Mrs. Slorah disgorged torrents of Scripture upon Hugh. She looked so stricken that Hugh, remembering the prayers and the washboard, hurried to say the proper, beautiful things. She reminded him of the ambitious mother of James and John, who wished her sons to sit, one on the right hand, and one on the left, in the kingdom, with no idea of the cup which they must drink, nor the baptism with which they must be baptized.

But even as Hugh spoke to aspiring Mrs.

Slorah the miserable fire which had been scorching his own heart, ever since he read the Mount Vincent letter, faded, and faded away to ember. It seemed as if every quiet word he spoke were quenching that improper fire—until some time it should be kindled again.

"I'm happy for the first time since Martin was a corpse," Mrs. Slorah said, with a great smile. "Silas will have a little parsonage in the country, and I'll live with him, and I will be known as 'the minister's mother,' and the girl he picks out, she'll be known as 'the minister's wife.' "

Mrs. Slorah was sure that God had dropped Hugh in Smollett at this particular time, to convert her particular son. She was grateful to God, and to Hugh also, though he was an unconscious vessel.

An hour later Hugh opened the front screen door for her departure. As she went down the front steps she turned, with an air of business.

"Tell Mrs. Bloom," she said, briskly, "that the washing will be fifty cents more a week after this. I have to be saving up to send Silas through the seminary."

CHAPTER XIV

With a salary of twenty-five hundred dollars, Hugh and Stella felt that they might afford, with caution, a maid, as well as Mrs. Slorah. A maid was especially necessary because Smollett expected so much church work from Stella. In Smollett, the minister's wife had always been President of the Woman's Home Missionary Society, and for Stella to refuse that office would have been equivalent to denying her Lord and Master.

Business meetings bored her, and she was always longing to get them over with, so, as chairman, she used to say, "Old business," and before the scattered Smollett wits gathered she said, "New business," and then, after an indecently short interval, closed with, "Since there seems to be no business we will adjourn to the program. Mrs. Bottz will favor us with a piano solo." Along about the middle of the program some one always rose, with the air of a person who

has just come in out of a hard rain, and wailed, "Well, see here, madam chairman, I wanted to speak about those rompers we sent to Alaska."

As for Hugh, he was taken to the healthy, pounding heart of his congregation, and squeezed there, rather uncomfortably. From his exploits at Mount Vincent, they believed that he was against rich people, and, being jealous middle class, they were against rich people themselves. So they were dying to hear some sermons about Lazarus and Dives, and they crushed Hugh to their warm, but determined bosoms. Hugh tried to explain that there was no use preaching against rich people now, when there were none around, and that, moreover, he had never exactly preached against them, anyhow. But Smollett was not to be baffled and they almost choked him with cordiality. They invited him and his family, constantly, to hearty, indigestible meals of chicken and bitter biscuits, peanut butter, and preserved pears. Hugh and Stella had a bottle of tablets for defense, which they took as soon as they reached home.

The leading fancy grocer was the President of the Official Board, and the butcher, the baker, and the candlestick maker were moving spirits.

They were fond of relating to their minister how they had risen from delivery boyhood. Their wives, too, were all anxious to tell Hugh the story of their lives. Hugh saw an open-faced watch, pinned by a swastika to a woman's shirt-waist, tick through an hour and a quarter of uninteresting misfortunes. They told him about their operations and their confinements, evidently considering him a kind of male midwife. Hugh was wary of these women because he had heard that the druggist's wife, a few years ago, when church affairs were too happy and uneventful, had suddenly accused the minister of kissing her. So, after one pastoral visit, he left the women to Stella.

Prayer meeting became an important event in Hugh's life. Stone Valley had been too tired to attend it, and Mount Vincent had despised it. But the air of the midweek prayer service distended the vigorous Smollett nostril. There was little social life going on in big Smollett for candlestick makers. The real society of the town was Presbyterian or Episcopalian. So prayer meetings were a gala event to the Methodists. They sang the hymns in a sort of ecstatic bray, and liked to choose their own. Hugh used to

wonder how lustily they would roar if they were compelled to mean the words they sang, such as:

"Take my silver and my gold,
Not a mite would I withhold."

It was plain to see that Smollett took its hymns with a grain of salt.

Following the hymns, they insisted on a season of "sentence prayers," which ought to have been called "paragraph prayers." The subjects for prayer meeting they wished confined to discussions of abstruse Bible verses. Hugh could never entice them to any higher atmosphere, like a talk on "Ingratitude," or "The Meaning of Prayer." They liked to read Ezekiel, the most uninspired book of the Bible, and interpret such verses as: "So I prophesied as I was commanded: and as I prophesied, there was a noise, and behold a shaking, and the bones came together, bone to his bone." After the Bible verse had been disposed of, they enjoyed describing their conversions. Mr. Waulks, the wringer manufacturer, had survived a particularly spectacular one.

The only part of any service which Smollett did not enjoy was the collection. During the Morning Offering on Sunday, the organist might just as well have played, "Hear the Pennies

Dropping." But after that trial was over, they gave severe attention to Hugh's sermons. He could not complain of indifference. They sat forward in their pews, and listened, and discussed the sermon with Hugh afterward, as man to man. He found that he did not dare to make mythological, literary, or historical (except Washington and Lincoln) references in his sermons, because they called him on the telephone all Sunday afternoon and asked him to explain them. They were a little suspicious of all his similes and metaphors because they might not be "gospel." Any sermon on current events was not "gospel." If Hugh tried to draw some lessons from the Spanish War, that was not "gospel." Nothing was "gospel" but a verse out of the Bible, properly expounded, without any wicked-sounding embellishments.

As he had always done, Hugh preached as he saw the need, regardless of consequences, although Mr. Smiley, the overall man, almost wagged his head off in disapproval. Mr. Smiley knew a good overall when he saw one, so he thought he knew everything else. He would have run for President of the United States, if anyone had asked him. When cornered in an argument, he used to throw up his hands and

exclaim, "Wheels within wheels." This gave him the reputation for being a man of complicated intellect.

He owned the largest business in the church—and it was not very large. All the trustees and stewards were small shopkeepers. Hugh could see the effect of little business in the Official Board meetings. In Mount Vincent, the sessions of the Board had been negligible to the members. The main difficulty had been to get a quorum. But here, in Smollett, the Board was a chance for the men to flourish and dominate, and every member exercised his privileges. The Board's expression was one of unrelaxing sternness; any joke was instantly snuffed out of existence, and a laugh was considered far more vulgar than a hiccough.

The Secretary had a gubernatorial voice, and he monologued his minutes. The Treasurer, Mr. Yudd, was a persistently gloomy man, a foreman in a trousers factory, which he called, with a sigh, the "Pants Works." He was always positive that the church was headed for financial rocks, and he spent half an hour at each meeting proving it. When the balance in the treasury was high, he bemoaned all the things it had to be spent on, and when the balance was low, Mr.

Yudd's condition indescribably corresponded. He invariably concluded his report with the words: "By the grace of God, the balance in our treasury is five hundred dollars and sixty-one cents. Respectfully submitted, Moses Yudd." Because of his pessimism and his deferential reference to God, he was thought to be both pious and efficient—a rare combination of qualities. But Mr. Yudd's sorrowful half hour was only the beginning of those long, long Board meetings. The men were so accustomed, in their shops, to splitting crackers and measuring goods by inches that minor details to them seemed mighty. They would argue an hour over a dollar.

Sometimes, when they were arguing, Hugh would close his eyes and think of cathedrals, of brown camels in a line across the desert, of blue Galilee and vivid Jerusalem and the intense Italian sea. He wondered if there would ever be a church to which he could give the best of himself. He thought, very sadly, that he was using only half of himself with these people, and the worst half at that. Stone Valley did not understand his best—Mount Vincent did not care—and now Smollett desired its own kind, only.

Hugh tried, conscientiously, to write poetry in

his small, spare hours, but his skill seemed to have vanished. Rhyme and meter would not obey. Prose came readily enough, so he decided to use that until he had more time some day. He wrote little sketches of church life, and had them accepted by the *Christian Herald.* He investigated living conditions in Smollett and wrote astonishing reports, and the *Christian Advocate* paid him fifteen dollars for them, with which he was innocently satisfied. The *Christian Advocate* was edited by a man who was not sure of his adverbs, but who had made the paper pay for the first time in its history. He knew that he had a good thing in Hugh's articles, and he advertised them well. They gave Hugh considerable publicity in the Conference, and the successful preachers began to treat him like a brother and offer him cigars. Hugh continued to investigate factories and tenements and strikes, to get away from his own church's stifling little back yard. His congregation, or the "Gans Street Church," as they were called, did not think that sermons about sanitation and working conditions were "gospel," but Hugh ignored that, and kept on, and began to draw to his church the laboring class, who came an hour early, in their flannel shirts and dark shawls, to

get good seats, and who stumbled over the Responsive Reading.

The original Gans-Streeters were incensed at this. They desired Hugh to preach against rich people, but not for poor people. They thought that no class should be preached for but the great middle class, the back bone of the nation. Hugh could not have persuaded the ladies of Gans Street to cry over drunkards from Water Street Mission. They would have called the drunkards "lazy good-for-nothings," and settled their glasses, and put in their combs, and pulled down their skirts, and taken out their fancy work.

Smollett women were always embroidering fancy work. Stella shrewdly began some petticoat lace before she had been in Smollett six months. When a Gans Street girl became engaged, she started to lay the foundations of a family at once, and was never seen without intimate sewing. Convention dictated that she make a dozen corset covers and a dozen nightgowns. The nightgowns had high necks and long sleeves, and big, pink bows in the center foreground. The women thought that only prostitutes wore pajamas—and they did not intend to wear pajamas—or to have any preach-

ing about prostitutes in the Gans Street pulpit. They said that Hugh's sermons were becoming indecent. They said that if Hugh were going to preach about social unrest and industrial diseases, they simply could not bring their long-legged, pimply, virgin daughters to church.

Hugh, grown reckless in righteousness, continued preaching, and even went so far as the feeble-minded. He bought books about the famous subnormal family of the "Pineys," whom Gans Street thought were a summer resort. At Stella's suggestion, Hugh distributed cards through the city, with the picture of the church on them and the subject of next Sunday's sermon printed below the picture. The Smollett newspapers took notice of Hugh and published his sermons under headlines, until the Presbyterian minister went to the *Morning Eagle* and asked, pointedly, if it were a "Methodist owned" paper. He was of the opinion that such advertisement paid the Methodists too well, to the detriment of decent denominations. Moses Yudd did not think that this advertisement paid, however. That foreboding Treasurer said that although the crowd did increase the collections, they wore out the church carpets.

On week days, Hugh spoke at Chambers of

Commerce, and dinners, and unveilings, and corner stones, and memorials.

"I speak so much that I don't have time to think," Hugh said to Stella, "and no time to write anything but those *Advocate* articles. When I retire from the ministry I am going to buy a farm and sit under a tree and write poetry."

Hugh's retirement was a time they anticipated, and they saved their money for that time, painfully. Although Hugh was still so young, he felt that his life was rather stupendous and tiring. He did not confuse activity with accomplishment, and his Mount Vincent experience had made him feel that what he was doing had little permanent value. Moreover, he always knew that his life was hedged about by Conference—unconquerable Conference. He thought that he would not have minded anything so much if he could have been sure of his own kind understanding him—if the so-called Bride of Christ had only been a bosom and a refuge, instead of a vain and fickle creature, tapping her toe on his horizon.

So Hugh endowed his life after retirement with all the utopian glamour with which the classic poets endow blessed isles and lotus lands,

with their branches of pale, enchanted fruit, and their purple hills of amaranth and moly. Hugh said that then his life would no longer be one kaleidoscopic change of problem—no longer one person after another demanding his heart and his hours as a right. Hugh's congregation had more of his heart than they ever knew. He was never able to be composed and business-like about his religious duties. After comforting a bereaved family, he could eat no dinner, and funerals gave him severe headaches. Yet some successful and highly paid ministers have been known to crack jokes in the funeral carriage on the way to the cemetery, and can progress from condolences to congratulations without a tremor, like undertakers' folding chairs, which can be used equally well for both funerals and marriages.

Funerals were much more plentiful than weddings in Hugh's life, and the latter he enjoyed. He was saving the money he was given at weddings especially for Helen. Stella used to go nearly distracted during the marriage ceremony and reception, wondering how much the groom had given him. Sometimes, overcome at particularly well-to-do nuptials, she even sidled up

to Hugh and asked him, but he always teased her by pretending not to understand.

When they reached home, at last, Hugh would slowly draw a white envelope from his frock-coat pocket, and Stella would say, out of breath, "How much?"

"Guess!" Hugh would reply, waggling the envelope.

"Fifteen!" (hopeful).

"Nope."

"Twenty!" (ecstatic).

"No—no."

"Two!" (low and sad).

"Nope."

"Five!" (resigned).

"Yes—but you must remember, dear, that he is only a ribbon clerk."

Hugh officiated at the wedding of Mr. Overall Smiley's daughter, in the fifth year of his pastorate. One month after the wedding, Mr. and Mrs. Smiley called at the parsonage. Mr. Overall Smiley's disapproving wags had ceased a long time ago, and now he was as friendly as fly paper. Mrs. Smiley was a woman without curves, who was as proud of her respectability as a reformed harlot. She had borne six children, and, unless a woman had equally as many

offspring, she might as well not try to argue with Mrs. Smiley. If a woman asked Mrs. Smiley her opinion on the Panama Canal, or on Roosevelt, or leg-of-mutton sleeves, and differed with her, she silenced opposition by saying, "My dear, if you are ever the mother of six children, you will feel as I do."

Since Stella had only one child, she had not been able to get along with Mrs. Smiley very well. But this evening the mother of six was most ingratiating, and Stella wondered what she had ever done to deserve it. As usual, after a preliminary skirmish, the men began to talk together, leaving the women to their own conversation. Stella despised such cleavage, because the men always talked about the interesting things and the women only compared recipes. But Mrs. Smiley, instead of recipes, discussed the latest novel, in which, as she expressed it, there was "little left unsaid." However, after she had finished with this unfortunate book, there was little left to say, and Stella, during the last half hour of the call, was squeezing conversation out of herself in labored spurts, like cold tooth paste. The men, on the other hand, were unusually talkative, and Mrs. Smiley had to say,

"Well, hubby dear, we better be running along," three times before hubby heard her.

Stella and Hugh undressed swiftly in the dark, as tired people do, and in ten minutes they were lying side by side in bed.

"Thank God for the man who invented beds!" Stella sighed. "I'm dead tired!"

"Stella, Smiley gave me a chance to buy a little stock in his overall business," Hugh announced in a small, excited voice in the dark.

"No—sir—don't—you—do it!" Stella replied in very wide-awake tones.

Hugh experienced the irritation of those who are condemned without a hearing.

"You don't understand, Stella. Smiley has been running this business for nineteen years and it's as safe as any business in the country. Smiley's overalls are known all over the United States and Canada. Every Kansas farmer wears 'em. The company is getting so prosperous they want to expand and they're issuing more stock. As a great favor to me, Smiley is giving me a chance at this new stock. Moses Yudd is going in it, too, with a couple of thousand."

"Sounds well. What's the dividend?"

"Eight per cent."

"Sounds almost too good. I've always de-

tested Smiley. His legs are too short for him to be an honest man."

"Now, Stella, you, who are so big and broad-minded—you aren't going to let a little personal peculiarity prejudice you. Poor Smiley can't help his legs. He was triplets or something of the sort."

"It isn't his legs. I just don't think you ought to do it."

"Now listen, dear," Hugh said with obvious patience, sitting up in bed. "The overall business is as safe as railroads or any of those investments. Farmers have to have overalls and they want Smiley's. Now if we should put our thousand—"

"Hugh—our thousand—our precious thousand!"

"If we put our thousand into that and got eight per cent—that would be eighty dollars a year—just twice what we get here at the bank—and we could add the eighty to the thousand and then next year we would get eighty-six dollars and forty cents and then—"

"I can't help what you say. "I don't think you ought to do it."

"What good reason can you give, Stella?" Hugh asked, formidably, creaking the bed.

Stella could hear him scratching himself, as he always did when he argued.

"It's just my intuition. I don't trust Mr. Smiley. I don't like the way he looks around a room without turning his head. I don't care if overalls are as safe as Gibraltar. Jupiter Smiley is not a safe man."

"Now, Stella," Hugh said, gesturing in the gloom, "a woman's intuition is all right for babies, but scientists have proved it is no good for anything else. A man knows three times as much about these things as a woman. You just leave it to me. I care just as much about that thousand as you do. We saved it together. Smiley is a good chap. He isn't cultured, and he hasn't an oversupply of brains, but he's as honest as an apple. He's been standing up square for me in the Board lately, and he pushed a couple of things through for me. He says he just wants me to have this inside chance—"

"You can do what you want with your thousand. But I think it is better to be absolutely safe than get a big per cent. In our town, a man skinned his minister out of three thousand dollars. Everybody knows that tricky business men always go for ministers the first thing, because they are easy marks. You know I trust

you and want you to do right. Just promise me you will wait a week, and pray about it."

Hugh promised. But after a week of waiting, and praying, and visiting the overall factory, he was more enthusiastic than ever. So one afternoon he took the thousand dollars out of his savings account, marveling at the nonchalance of the bank officials as they handed it over. He came home to Stella, that evening, carrying a handsome engraved certificate, with a pair of beautiful blue overalls, rampant, at the top. When Stella saw it, she felt as if one of the family had died, and this was the death certificate.

Hugh immediately rented a safe-deposit box for his security. In three months he received his first dividend, normally enough, and even Stella revived and began to make-believe about the future. In the course of a week after the dividend, Hugh and Stella imagined they bought and furnished a farm, and published five books of poetry, each more successful than the last. They also purchased in fancy two glossy horses, and a carriage with a deep fringe around the top. When they knelt in family prayer, every day, on the dining-room rug, Stella, instead of squinting and studying the roses in the pattern,

as she usually did, lost herself in devout dreams of antique farmhouse furniture and fresh cream. Hugh, in his exuberance, bought Helen a canary bird that she promptly baptized Elsie Dinsmore. It gave Hugh a sort of shock to realize that she did not care to call it after any Bible character.

The next Sunday, Hugh missed Mr. Smiley at church.

"Must be sick," Hugh said, and called the Smiley house on the telephone. No one answered.

On Monday afternoon a pastoral call took Hugh past the overall factory. As he came near he missed the usual buzzing and clattering, and when he was close enough he saw on the door a neat white card saying, "Closed Until Further Notice."

There were knots of workmen strung along the curb, and Hugh asked if they knew what this meant.

"Sure," one workman said, speaking through a very warty nose. "Smiley run off Sat'day night. Missis Smiley wit' 'im. De works has went bum. We fellas figgered dat out four mont' ago when he come 'round wit' his grin on an' asked us if we didn't wanter be 'profit

sharers'—he calls it. He says it was some new notion, but we fellas figgered he needed cash. I says to Joe here, I says—"

Hugh had left the men and was taking the street for home. In his head were pounding Stella's yearning words, "Hugh—our thousand—our precious thousand." If a juggernaut had been coming down the street, he would have thrown himself before it. Death was too uncertain with a horse and carriage—he might only be maimed. He had one moment's relief in his blackness as he thought of what Moses Yudd must be suffering. He wondered how Moses had broken the news to Mrs. Moses. Stella was sitting on the upper piazza, sewing, and she waved to Hugh as he came up the street, but her smile petrified when she saw Hugh's face.

"Our thousand—our precious thousand," Hugh groaned, sitting down in the hammock and putting his head down in its yellow folds.

"Gone?" Stella asked, sticking her needle a foot away from its proper place, blinded by sudden tears.

"Yes. Smiley went out of town Saturday night—"

"All gone?"

"Yes—all."

Stella, by a superhuman effort, which was recorded to her credit in the Book of Life, did not say, "I advised you against it." She simply sat and rocked gently, and slowly scratched the point of her needle along her sewing. The thousand had been almost as a second child to her. She had watched it grow from little to much. She had sacrificed for it. She had walked home from places on the far side of the town, when a trolley car seemed to her tired feet as desirable as Aphrodite's chariot—all to save five cents for the money child in the bank. Now it was whisked out of existence. Hugh lay motionless in the hammock, waiting for a burst of justified rage from his wife. But, as none came, he finally spoke.

"I wouldn't care for myself," he said, "but I've cheated you and the baby. And our retirement—that seems so far away—now we have nothing." Stella walked over and sat beside Hugh in the hammock. She took his hand and smoothed it with great tenderness, while Hugh's breath came in long sighs. She watched the farm, and Hugh's poetry, and the glossy horses, fade away down an interminable avenue—out of sight.

"I don't believe it!" Stella said, finally, putting out her chin.

"Believe what?" Hugh asked, uncovering a red face.

"That 'all things work together for good to those who love the Lord'!"

CHAPTER XV

Every year that Hugh went to Conference he was treated more humanely. Bishop Brewster, who had once been at his prayers when Hugh called, now invited him to dine, and Mrs. Bishop graced the occasion in a necklace. His fellow ministers thought that Hugh's simplicity and devotion to good were signs of deep guile, and respected him very much. They slapped him on the back and asked him who he thought ought to go where, in the Conference.

It was their fashion, also, to boast that they were liberal-minded. The incumbent of Saint Luke's said he had taken up tennis. Murdock Memorial had learned five hundred. Hugh played nothing but dominoes, so he was silent. But his silence made them think he was concealing fathoms of free-mindedness, and he was soon invited to join the Monday Afternoon Club, a select gathering which always followed the weekly Preachers' Meeting.

After he had attended one session of this club, Hugh wondered how women ever happened to

have all the reputation for gossip. These Monday Afternoon tomcats talked about the sermon that Stevens of Dobbs Ferry had preached last Sunday; about the committee Saint John's was sending out for a new man; about the rumored split in Saint Paul; about the new man from the Maryland Conference; about Bishop Merrill being seen at the play "Bare Shoulders"; about the report that Horton of Orr's Mills was very heterodox about the Virgin birth; about Bennett's new twins; the brick addition to the Newton parsonage; the way Smith had irrevocably shocked the Ladies' Friendship Band of Dixon Memorial in his talks to them on "Famous Translations of the Bible," because he had included the "breeches Bible."

Hugh went only twice to the Monday Afternoon Club. The atmosphere there made him want to go stand on a hill and remove his collar and gulp. Whenever he saw the gathering he thought of the words, "Who hath not lifted up his soul unto vanity, nor sworn deceitfully." There were so few in the club who could pass that definition.

Hugh was never tempted to lower his own standard. Inheritance and early environment

had woven his principles in him so securely that it would have been impossible to change them radically without tearing apart the whole man. It is easy for men to change who have their principles only painted on. Belief in God and goodness was as much a part of Hugh as his lungs. He had, as Stella sometimes suspected, a streak of stubbornness, too, that helped him, and a sense of the dramatic and heroic. Also, as Stella had said, God comforted him. He still took those trips upward through the cold, black air, which he had begun to take in his prayers at Stone Valley. Only he went further, now. At such times, God was a person only just out of reach, whom he might have touched, if he had the courage to stretch out his arm. Whenever he was praying for any special thing, he thought he could hear, sometimes, a little "Click!" from God. That meant the prayer was answered.

When Hugh had such secret spiritual sustaining as that, he could afford to let little things go and not worry over trifles. He had the passage marked in his Bible which says:

In the meantime the disciples prayed him saying Rabbi, eat.

But he said unto them, I have meat to eat that ye know not.

He marked that passage with red ink.

In the tenth year of his Smollett pastorate, Hugh wanted Stella to attend Conference with him. Some ministers' wives did attend, and there were special tea parties for them. Stella was not especially anxious to go. She said that a gathering of ministers' wives always made her long to dash out and be a burglar, or break the Mann Act, or be otherwise terrible. A lot of ministers' wives together is even worse than the wives at a college men's reunion. For a minister often marries some girl in his first parish, because the life of an unmarried minister is almost insupportable. These first-parish mates are not able to ascend with their husbands, and many a city preacher has a wife who is in one long agony with her grammar.

Stella did not care to consort with such as these, but she promised to go. However, the day before Conference, Helen came down with chicken pox, so Hugh went alone. He wondered if he would be returned to Gans Street. He hoped for a change. He saw that, in spite of his popularity, a force, backed by Andrews, was acting to keep him out of the big New York

churches. The Andrews party was perfectly willing for him to stay in Smollett, which he had built up to be the largest church outside of New York city, but they did not want him to advance a step further if they could help it. And they were watching for the slightest misstep on his part.

The Conference, this year, was electing delegates to the General Conference, which meets every four years—a union of all Conferences of Eastern and Western Methodism. To his utter amazement, Hugh found himself a delegate. He was aware of what a coveted boon it was to be a delegate, because from those who go to General Conference the bishops are elected. He was all the more astonished because he knew that he had never been an especially "good fellow" with the successful preachers and their Monday Afternoons. Hugh had always been too sympathetic with the lesser men of the Conference to ally himself completely with the noisy, domineering group. Whenever he was being surrounded and slapped on the back, he had a vision of an outer circle of wistful, unsuccessful faces—like his father's.

Hugh, all unknowing, had been elected delegate by the vote of the little men—those wistful,

unsuccessful faces. Little men can be mighty, if they are unanimous. They voted for Hugh, partly, on account of his father. They were serving in Daniel Bloom's old parishes—Estey's Corners and Genoa—and they had heard about Daniel from his parishioners, who endowed Balaam and the buggy and its driver with heroic, mythological proportions. Those country preachers, watching Hugh's career, thought that he had inherited his father's unconscious integrity. When they looked at Hugh, they felt as connoisseurs do, seeing a piece of something genuine in their line—or like the merchant in the Book of Matthew, who sought goodly pearls, and found one Pearl of Great Price.

General Conference convened in Ohio. Gans Street was so flattered to have its pastor a delegate that they voted him twenty-five dollars for expenses before they had time to repent, and Moses Yudd wrote down the amount with tears. Fortified by twenty-five dollars, Hugh resolved to take his family with him, and reserved a whole section on the sleeping car. Helen firmly believed that they were all going to the circus, and enjoyed anticipating the elephants.

Once in Ohio, they went to the delegates' hotel—the Saint Augustine. Its name and its

cheapness had recommended it to the Conference Committee on Accommodations. The Blooms' room had a neat view of a brick wall, and, if they contorted, they could see some sky. But they spent little time in their room, anyway. Hugh was eternally at the sessions, and his family visited the library and the Civil War Monument, and sat in the gallery at the afternoon sessions. Helen, in spite of explanations, was still sure that this was the circus, and expected to see giraffes any minute.

The opening days of General Conference were stormy. When Eastern and Western Methodism meet, there often is a notable absence of the peace that passeth all understanding. If the Easterners want something taken out of the Discipline, the Westerners want it kept in, and declare that it is the backbone of the Discipline. If the Westerners want a resolution passed to uphold the hands of the President, the Easterners are sure to favor smiting down his hands. But they did succeed in agreeing on several votes of confidence and righteous resolutions regarding current events, which were intended to make the devil turn tail, and which appeared in the metropolitan newspapers on the society pages.

Then, with the United States attended to, they settled down to the real entertaining business of electing new bishops. The Lord had taken away five bishops since the last election, so the Lord was to be instructed to give five more. The air buzzed with talk about "executive timber" and "bulwarks of Methodism." Hugh favored Parker of Saint Andrew's for bishop, but Parker would never be selected for a bulwark, because he had been heard to say that God liked all denominations equally (except Catholics, of course).

Hugh's reputation for desperate warfare made him be considered as a candidate at once. The story of his defying Andrews had spread, and he was treated, at least by the Westerners, as respectfully as a lighted firecracker. Before he was actually nominated, Hugh thought all the Conference was friendly to him. But after he was nominated the Conference immediately divided into two camps—the one side who seemed to think he was God, and the other side, who were sure he was Satan. Hugh's constituents called him the "Apostle of the Workingman," a "Well-trimmed Lamp," and the "Head of the Corner." The opposition called Hugh everything from a "Foolish Virgin" to a "Stone that

the Builders Rejected." They found that he owed the Smollett butcher nine dollars and that his uncle was a Baptist. They dug up his past, like boys looking for bait. They uncovered the Smiley episode, and called Hugh a "wastrel."

The leader of the opposition had a devastating gift for quoting the Bible. He glowered, and referred to Hugh as "the grass which to-morrow is cut down and cast into the furnace." He built the Bible into his conversation so skillfully that one received the impression that the Good Book had actually mentioned Hugh damnably. The opposition's candidate was a man named Gideon Thurber, with a bedside manner, who threw kisses at his second wife in the gallery. He was the son of a bishop, and so was naturally expected to pass from glory to glory. It was fortunate for the opposition that his name was Gideon, because they were able to take their watchword right out of the Bible: "The sword of the Lord and of Gideon!" and they intimated that the Lord had meant to say "of Gideon Thurber." There had never been a Bible character named Hugh, but his party made all they could out of his middle name—Wesley.

Stella had not slept a calm wink since the nomination. She had walked the floor, and done

her private bit of lobbying, and prayed tentatively. She had always thought it unsportsmanlike to pray to God only when you needed Him terribly. It was only fair to pay Him some attention betweentimes. But now she hoped that God might answer her prayer because she was Hugh's wife. Whenever she did succeed in sleeping, she dreamed everything from Hugh being unanimously elected bishop of the world, to his being sent back to Stone Valley. Even the big-eared little pitcher, Helen, knew about the excitement, and asked her father, every other minute, if he were going to be a "bish-hopper." Hugh himself was flushed and eager and joyous. He looked as young as he had at Stone Valley, and he bought Stella a new hat, and himself a malacca cane with a crook, and Helen, a scalloped white parasol.

"How does it sound, eh?" he said, as they were sitting in their room in the evening. " 'Bishop Bloom!' I like the alliteration. 'Bishop Hugh Wesley Bloom!' It sounds as swell as 'Your Royal Highness!' "

Stella patted his hand. She was thinking that publishers never refuse poetry by bishops.

"How does 'Mrs. Bishop Bloom' sound?" she asked, after a minute.

"Glorious. Too bad you can't be called 'Bishopess Bloom.' Maybe I can arrange it. I'll feel as powerful as God Almighty. I've always wanted to be God Almighty for just a minute. . . . Stella, do you know exactly where mother's picture is?"

"In the steamer trunk, home somewhere, with all the pictures. That trunk is a dreadful mess. When we pack for the papal palace I will straighten everything out."

"I wish I had her picture here. You know, mother always had her heart set on my being bishop. I'd sort of like to take that picture in my pocket to the election."

"It's a shame, darling. We'll put the picture on our most prominent mantelpiece in the bishop house, and that will be something."

"Yes. . . . My, I feel so happy! Before I came to Conference, I was sort of all in and headachy, but I haven't had a twinge since I've been here. The change has done me good. Gans Street has rather gotten on my nerves this last year. It is hard to be always keeping down to their level. I have felt so crushed, sometimes. . . . It's hard to 'labor and faint not!' . . . I do believe the Conference, and the congregations, too, would rather have talking machines

than men in the pulpits. . . . No wonder bright boys don't go into the ministry any more. They see what an inferior lot most ministers are. Pretty soon, only the rag, tag, and bobtail of our youth will study theology." Hugh was thinking aloud, in jerks.

Stella saw that Hugh, in spite of his exhilaration, looked wan and had puffy circles beneath his eyes. So she ordered him straight to bed.

"Bed is the one place where my enemies can't ask me my opinions," Hugh chuckled, as he unhooked his shoes. "At Conference, when an opponent sees me, he rushes up and asks my opinion on something to test me. I have been asked my interpretation of the Atonement forty times. I always quote Scripture to those folks, if I can. It takes the wind out of their sails."

When the yellow, hissing gas light was turned off, at last, and the one window was opened for the night, Stella lay with her hands clasped behind her head, ruminating. She heard Helen, over on her cot, crooning to herself in a thin treble. She heard, further, the mounting dissonance of dishes in the hotel kitchen, and the laughter of chambermaids in the courtyard four stories below, crescendo and diminuendo.

Stella tried to be honest with herself and dis-

cover whether she really believed Hugh would be bishop. She knew that Hugh, himself, was very certain of his election. The other night he had discussed with her the menu of their first apostolic dinner party, and he had hinted at a new purple lounging jacket for a bishop's leisure hours—a really dignified jacket, without frogs. And, most of all, he had spoken of how much better he meant to make things for everyone, when he was bishop, as if he could force a sort of millennium.

All this hoping would make it more terrible for Hugh, if he lost. For him, it would be a fall like that of Icarus, who soared too high on wings that were only wax. Stella was very afraid that Hugh's wings, built of hope, might also be perishable. She knew the strength and malice of his enemies in a way that he could not, in his mood of sanguine trust. Four days ago she had seen William Frigg Andrews arrive at the Saint Augustine. This had worried her tremendously, but Hugh had not seemed to mind, any more than a person, blanketed to the chin, cares for the cold. Hugh was swathed warm, in dreams. As she thought of this, Stella drew her own bed blanket tighter to her chin, and sighed.

She heard Hugh groaning to himself on his

half of the bed, and she knew, by that, he was praying. Stella would have given her eyes if she could get the comfort out of prayer that Hugh did. Hugh's groans increased, and he began to move slightly upon his pillow, as if in pain. Stella might have been some bystander, watching Jacob wrestle with the angel on the plains of Peniel. Hugh had never prayed so hard before, nor with such determination. She felt oddly excited, and she almost cried out: "Hold Him, Hugh! Don't let Him go until He promises!"

After a long time, Hugh lay quiet, with a deep, tired breath. Stella intended to say nothing, but curiosity overcame her at last. Usually she did not intrude upon Hugh at such times, but this bishop business was so important. She turned toward her husband and raised herself on one elbow.

"Hugh," she said, humbly, "what did God say? Did you hear 'Click'?"

The morning of the election day, they all woke, breathless. Hugh actually panted while he dressed, and Helen, alert to the occasion, put a silk sash and best black shoes on her doll. After lunch, Stella dressed for the momentous

afternoon session, deciding to wear her arctic-blue chiffon, and her new hat with the shiny cherries spilling all along the brim. Hugh was as partial to a cherry hat as if he had been a robin. Helen, stiff with starched ruffles, raised her scalloped parasol before she left the hotel room, and followed close after her blue mother down the stairs, striving to walk like a bishop's child. In the lobby, Stella saw Andrews sending a telegram. She turned her head, to avoid speaking, and unconscious Helen, blinded by scallops, jabbed him with one of her points.

Arrived at the session, mother and daughter sat in the first row of the balcony, their feet in a mass of old programs. Below them were the heads of the men, more or less bald—a horrid sight, Helen thought. Stella leaned over the railing, searching for Hugh, and saw him, sitting by a north window, in an uncomplimentary light. Stella thought that any woman candidate would have known better than to take such a seat. After the program commenced, Hugh looked up at the gallery—once—and caught his wife's eyes. To her, his edged look was like a knife, cleaving the air between them.

As for Hugh, he felt breathless as a bird that has been flying for an eternity before some un-

opened barrier. He felt that he could not wait and fly much longer. If the barrier stayed closed, if the larger opportunity were denied him, he must shut his wings and drop—somewhere.

Just before the balloting, General Conference sang, "God is my strong salvation. What foe have I to fear?"

"What foe have I to fear?" Hugh whispered to his soul, stoutly, as the balloting was being done. "What foe have I to fear?"

And his soul answered, "William Frigg Andrews!"

Before the winning names were read, the presiding bishop offered a short prayer, to heighten the suspense.

"Oh, God," Hugh prayed, clutching the sides of his seat, "if I do get it—help me to be humble. And if I don't get it—help me not to care too much."

In three minutes more Hugh learned that the barrier was going to stay closed always. The bishop read the name of Gideon Thurber. When Hugh first heard that other name, he thought, for just a moment, that the Conference must be playing a gigantic jest for his benefit. He almost called out to the bishop, "You are joking!"

He turned his head and saw Thurber half rise in his seat and bow to the gallery, with his hand to his lips.

Then Hugh went blind for a whole minute. He had the sensation of falling for miles and miles—endlessly falling—crumpled—as if his wings had melted on his shoulders. He saw the faces of those who came around him to condole, as if they were streaming upward past him, like rockets. He did not go and grasp the moist hand of Gideon. That was remembered against Hugh, afterward, by certain people in the Conference. The truth was that he did not think of Thurber, after the first moments. He thought only of Stella, as a falling bird may think of some bough it has known.

"If I can get to Stella, once, I shall have something to hold to," he told himself.

He fought his way to the door, with space rushing around his ears. Stella was waiting for him by the front entrance, with the look of a compassionate seraph—dressed in sky—with a cherry halo. Hugh fumbled for her hand, and, when he found it, everything stopped rushing. There was a complete quiet, as if they were a painted man and woman, sorrowing upon some canvas.

After a moment they stepped outdoors into the fresh, scurrying afternoon. They began to walk to the hotel by way of the park, and chose a path between some pine trees, where it was appropriate and gloomy.

"I never want to see that old church where that session was held, again!" Stella said, finally, with refreshing rage. "I wouldn't go back there for a thousand dollars!"

"Me, either!" Hugh echoed, feeling a little more human and less like a shooting star. "I never could stand it to go in that door again."

But they did go back.

For, two blocks later, Helen discovered that she had forgotten her parasol.

She had left it in the gallery.

CHAPTER XVI

THE Blooms reached Smollett on the following Saturday, Hugh's birthday. Grotesquely they tumbled from the sleeping car, at four o'clock in the morning. There were no cabs at that dark hour, so they ground their teeth and walked, half asleep, to the parsonage. They had written Hazel, the maid, the hour of their arrival, but she was slumbering on the third story, as comfortable as a cat, and had to be shaken to an apologetic sensibility.

In an hour, breakfast was ready, a rather unsatisfactory breakfast, as there were no oranges and no milk for the muffins. Hugh had rushed about, lighting fireplaces and heaters, to dispel the melancholy cold which seemed to permeate the very tissues of the house.

Helen had been behaving very curiously ever since they reached home, darting in and out of her bedroom, with one hand behind her back. At the breakfast table her behavior reached a climax, for, with a shrill squeal, she laid upon her father's plate a large, square object, wrapped

in blue drug-store paper. There was a white card, too, embroidered in joy bells, saying, "Happy Birthday."

Helen's parents had both forgotten the birthday. Stella was remorseful for her delinquent memory, and Hugh was touched. Helen, by this time, was back in her chair at the table, assuming serpentine postures prompted by extreme delight.

"Open it, parp!" she roared, unable to endure the suppressed ecstasy another minute.

"Where did you get the money for this?" Stella demanded, suspiciously.

"I found ten cents in papa's old pants—I mean trousers," Helen answered, triumphantly proper.

"It's smooth and light!" Hugh chanted, feeling the package, not too carefully.

Then, after a nervous struggle with the knots, the present was open. It was a chromo of the Pope. He sat upon the papal throne, very gaudily garbed, with the Fisherman's ring upon his finger and the official hat upon his head. Helen's eyes dilated and she actually snorted for joy. Perhaps, she thought to herself, the Pope might look well in the living room, next to the "Dying Gladiator."

"Gorgeous!" Hugh ejaculated, when he found his voice, passing over the picture to Stella.

"Gorgeous?" Stella exclaimed, questioningly. "Why, it's the Pope!"

Hugh pressed Stella's foot under the table, and coughed, warningly.

"How did you come to buy it, Helen?" he said. "How did you know that I wanted His Holiness?"

"Why—I liked the gold and red. I never even noticed until the very end that it was the Pope. The colors were so pretty."

"That child," Hugh said, as he set the picture solemnly against the vinegar cruet, "is going to be an artist. I see the symptoms."

To Helen's gratification, Hugh put her offering on his study desk when he began to prepare his sermon for Sunday. He suspected that Helen had thought he would look something like the Pope when he was elected bishop, only she was too tactful to say so, now. He wondered if he were neglecting Helen's religious education. She had been heard to say that she did not like Sunday School, and she had been rather silent when Aunt Agatha sent her a Red Letter Testament for Christmas. And once, when she

was angry at Stella, she had threatened to worship idols.

Hugh put his head between his hands and stared. He could not seem to find an idea for his sermon. His brain was swept bare. It was like trying to preach after a tornado. How could he sit down, among the ruins, and plan exegesis?

Stella had said that Smollett would be watching his first sermon. If he were the least bit vindictive, or preached from any fiery text, they would say that he had taken defeat poorly. He longed to use the text: "Them that call themselves apostles, and are not." But he realized he could not safely preach that sermon for at least two years. He chose the theme: "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the spirit saith to the churches." He knew that this subject, too, might be misconstrued, but he could not bring himself to preach anything like: "Little children, love one another." He felt that Daniel, his father, would have chosen something gentle like that, but Hugh was not, and did not want to be, Daniel. Hugh steeled himself severely against meekness.

On Sunday morning the church was crowded. Hugh went to his pulpit as late as possible, in

order to avoid meeting anyone, but Moses Yudd was waiting for him in the little anteroom to the auditorium.

"Too bad! Too bad, Brother Bloom!" he moaned. "I should think you would feel all cut up about it, too, after you've spent out all that sight of money. 'Tain't often that Gans Street lays out twenty-five dollars on a man to have it come to nothing. God is chastening us hard for our extravagance, Brother Bloom. The plumber has charged us two dollars more than we expected for that new tin sink!"

Hugh had his first impulse to kill a man. He actually measured the distance to the green glass window, spotted with white lambs, and speculated on how loud a crash Moses Yudd would make. But Moses never knew how near to the Valley of the Shadow he came. For Hugh only made a savage jaw, started to stride by, and then stopped.

"The church—" Hugh said, furiously.

He had meant to say, "The church shall be reimbursed for this twenty-five dollars," but some of the common sense which Stella had trained into him through the years restrained this rashness. Twenty-five dollars would have been as difficult for Hugh to give as twenty-five

flamingos. So he said nothing further, and went into the auditorium a little comforted by his self-control.

As he ascended the pulpit there was a gush and rustle from his congregation. As he knelt down by his chair to pray, a regretful, "Tck! Tck!" reached his ears. When he was forced to look over the pulpit and announce the first hymn, he saw rows and rows of eyes—pitying, disappointed eyes. Gans Street had evidently taken his misfortune as a personal affront. They had been too sure of his being elected bishop, and they had boasted about it, rashly, to other congregations in Smollett. Now they were most uncomfortable. They were sure that Hugh must have done something queer at the Conference.

When it was time for the long pastoral prayer, Hugh could have prayed very well if he had voiced the supplications surging in his own heart. But those supplications would have shocked Smollett. So he prayed very cheerfully, with his eyes in a watchful slit, and he saw that the congregation was observing him intently—some through a lattice-work of fingers; some slyly over their fists; and some openly, bolt upright. As a consequence Hugh's prayer was

poor, for him, although many ministers would have been proud of it. But Hugh could not be as good a shepherd as usual when the sheep (and the rams, too) were sitting in sorrowful rows and peeking between their hoofs.

The sermon balked. Hugh tried every way to make it go. He built a fire beneath it. He shouted, and lashed with the reins. But the sermon only stood still, and blinked, and, occasionally, swished its tail. It would not carry Hugh to any given point. But, again, the majority of pastors would have been delighted to preach as good a sermon. Hugh, however, had set himself a severe standard, and, in so doing, had spoiled his congregation for anything less. So they thought this sermon was poor. They had forgotten what a really poor sermon was like. Because they had become accustomed to Hugh, they believed that the general run of minister was like him and that others similar were waiting around every corner. They never suspected that there was anything very unique about him.

Hugh was thoroughly bathed in condolences, after the service. He heard pages of well-meaning Deuteronomy, and fifty verses from Lamentations, but not one word of cheer. No

one said: "Never mind. It doesn't matter." One would think, from the uproar, that Hugh was the dove returned to the ark without the branch of olive, causing uncontrollable grief to the kangaroos. With his back against a pew post, Hugh smiled and smiled, with iron gallantry.

That Sunday afternoon in the parsonage could not be described. Hugh walked the floor, shouting, and Stella kept pace with him, while Helen crouched in a corner with her paper dolls, careful not to offend in thought, word, or deed. To have his people sorry for him was the bitterest drop in Hugh's hemlock. Hugh had intended to cut and slash at Methodism, and be respected, instead of pitied. Imagine Saint George confronted by a compassionate dragon with tears coursing down its jaws!

"They'll get over it," was the burden of Stella's refrain. And she added, also, "You won't be fit for your evening service."

The congregation did get over the worst of their pity. Commiseration is too unnatural to be long continued. But Hugh, who was barometrically sensitive to atmospheric conditions, perceived a certain, new brittleness in people's manner toward him—as if lack of complete con-

fidence in him had stiffened them a little and made them less trustful and flabby. They looked at him, he thought, as a woman looks at an iceman whom she suspects of short weight.

To show them that he was as able as ever, Hugh threw himself into his work. That was bad for him. All the winter before Conference he had been feeling overdone and tired, but the thought of change and advancement had made him buoyant through the spring. Now he should have rested. But Smollett felt that he ought not to take his usual August vacation because he had been away resting so much in the spring. So he stayed by Gans Street all summer, and toiled more terribly than ever. Before, he had tried to avoid speaking at banquets and corner stones, because of his busyness and his fatigue. But now he seemed to welcome such invitations. Givers of banquets noticed this. Hugh, also, called on his parishioners with unfailing faithfulness, sometimes trudging six miles in an August afternoon. Stella saw that instead of being his customary brisk self on the telephone, he held long, intricate conversations over the wire, and he was an easier prey than ever to any busybody. Whenever he happened to have a free evening, he did not go to bed early and be

thankful, but he sat up very late in his study, with as many as twenty books tottering on the desk around him.

When he sat so late, Hugh was worrying about his sermons. He had been preaching less than his best for three months straight, and he was like a baseball pitcher who has lost too many games in a row. He had lost his nerve. The thought of preaching terrified him. Whenever he was especially self-conscious, he thought of himself as a bird with clipped wings, hopping and fluttering along the ground. Frogs and crickets were used to hopping, Hugh reflected, but he—he had been accustomed to sweep upward so easily, with large wing beat, as confident as a lark.

If Hugh had only been content to preach ordinary sermons, perhaps he might have escaped too much notice. If he had only followed the example of other ministers and reviewed a book for a sermon, or nourished his congregation with a hash of magazine articles, he might have been relaxed and restored, in time. But he insisted on trying to preach sermons containing original thought, and he insisted on pausing in his pulpit to fit the right word in the right place, when a second-rate word would have done just as well.

Gans Street did not like to have him pause. They liked a man to preach without signs of struggle. They set a high value on fluency, even though it was absolutely meaningless. They did not give a fig for original thought, and they had never quite forgiven Hugh, anyway, for preaching to the workmen sermons that were not "gospel."

Stella, meanwhile, sensing the criticism, felt as if she were crew on a ship that was nosing through a foggy ocean of icebergs. Any moment the boat might strike and go down. As she went past a neighbor's house, one September day, she heard a bright child imitating Hugh's rendering of the Scripture lesson, which he always read with manner—like a high priest. Stella shivered, as if it had grown colder suddenly. She did not tell the incident to Hugh, because it would have set him off into one of his new moods.

He had ferocious moods, now, when nothing Stella said could suit him. In such hours he even thought that she was sorry for him, and that frenzied him all the more. Again, at other times, he would be so unnecessarily humble that Stella was frightened. There was one especially wild hour when a manuscript came back from the *Christian Advocate*. Hugh had always looked

down upon the literary quality of this professional organ, and had dreamed of leaving it far behind, some day, when he wrote for the real magazines. And now to have them reject his writing. It was like being laughed at by a row of ungrammatical little newsboys. The very next day some church member asked Hugh when his next article was going to appear in the *Advocate*. He had been missing the articles lately, the member said.

At about this juncture the women of the church began to come to Stella, separately, and tell her that there was something she "ought to know." They went on to say that Hugh looked exactly like various uncles and cousins of theirs had looked before their "last sickness," and they prescribed various malodorous tonics for Hugh —especially camomile tea, as if he were an uneasy Peter Rabbit returned from Mr. McGregor's garden. All this talk, of which Hugh heard scraps, made him worse. He added his health to his list of worries. He began to imagine what would happen to his family if he died. He fancied Stella a boarding-house keeper, trying to keep some paying guests in clean towels and preserving his old sermons in a box under her bed. He imagined that she

would rather do this for a living than go to the Home for Aged Ministers' Wives.

Under the influence of this image, Hugh preached one of his old, vivid sermons, the first Sunday in November. It was a plea for the Worn-out Preachers' Fund, whose annual sermon was due. There were green cards in all the pews, and after the sermon the congregation were supposed to subscribe on those cards, and an extra collection was taken. Down in the Pastor's Pew, Helen, who had been in tears for ten whole minutes, subscribed the appalling amount of fifteen dollars on her card, and sneaked it into the collection plate without Stella's seeing. So Hugh was afterward hounded by the Conference pledge-collectors for the devastating result of his own oratory.

But Hugh relapsed again during the other Sundays in November and through December. The congregation grew less and the collections diminished. It was irritating to the church members to have to pity Hugh and make allowances for him so much. They really felt it would be best, somehow, to put him out of his misery, like a horse with a broken leg. The Presiding Elder, who came to the quarterly conferences, noticed that the reports were not so good as

usual, and spoke about it to Hugh—first jocularly, and then funereally. Hugh saw two of the Official Board take the Elder aside and talk with him, twiddling their watch chains, and coughing, and exchanging apologetic smiles. Hugh could imagine what conversations were taking place in the Monday Afternoon Club.

His disappointment at General Conference seemed very far back to Hugh now. He thought that he had gotten over it and was very philosophical about it, as he was about the old, raw-edged collars he wore for economy's sake. All he really cared about, now, was to get back on the old footing—to feel the sweep of success in his parish work once more. But there was no one to help him, no one wise enough to give him the needed lift. People are apt to look upon a minister who is soul-sick as they look upon a doctor who is body-sick. They feel that he ought to have known better, since that was his profession. It is the old, Crucifixion spirit of, "He saved others, himself he cannot save."

It was the first of January when Hugh realized most sharply that he must pull himself back to the old footing, whether he was helped or no. He had realized before that he must do something, but not so desperately. One night he had

a long talk with himself in his study, when Stella and Helen had gone off to New York to spend a few January days with a college friend. He was really glad they had gone, because, somehow, he wanted the whole house to himself. He liked to stride around while he was thinking. It eased his travail. That evening he pulled all the shades to the window sill and sat down in his study about nine o'clock. He had brought upstairs a wooden bowl full of walnuts. That was his dinner. He ate them quickly, one after the other, because he was not thinking of them in the least, and he rolled them from side to side of his mouth, squirrel fashion.

"This can't go on," he said to himself. "I've got to preach decent sermons, and I've got to quit having headaches."

It was like trying to turn a sailboat into the teeth of the wind. It was well enough for the helmsman to say, "This can't go on." That would be only the beginning of the struggle with the hostile wind and the green water.

"There must be something in will power," Hugh said. "Good God! My whole life is at stake! That ought to scare me into doing something. Once Gans Street is down on me, that will be the chance for Andrews and his gang.

I have always thought some miracle would make me better soon. But I guess I will have to make my own miracle."

At that, he went downstairs in an agony, and sat in the living room for a while, and sharpened all the pencils on Stella's secretary.

"Why haven't I been preaching well?" he said. "It's partly because I have been fundamentally afraid—afraid they would think I was a poor loser. That threw me off in the first place. I never used to care what people thought. I will say what is in my heart, after this. I preached that one good sermon in November because I said what I was feeling in my soul."

There was one verse in Isaiah which he had been thinking of lately. It seemed to fit in, and he clung to it.

> But they that wait for Jehovah shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; they shall walk, and not faint.

"With wings as eagles," Hugh murmured, as if it were an incantation, or a spell. "With wings as eagles. . . . I shall eat eggs for breakfast so as to gain some pounds, and I intend to sleep eight hours every night."

Those were the brave words of the helmsman. The next thing was to turn the boat, and that was not to be done in one Sunday, or two. It was easy enough to eat eggs, but sleep was not so easy. Hugh could not turn his thoughts off at night, like faucets. He discovered by experiment that the best way to woo slumber was to repeat the ritual burial service slowly. He knew it by heart. He used to startle Stella in the morning by saying, "Well, I buried five people last night." Stella suggested that he get control of his sermons by writing them out and memorizing them as he used to do at first in Stone Valley. This method was excellent. Hugh gave the appearance of great fluency, once more, and, as he gained confidence, went back gradually to notes again. Once more, words and images began to adorn his mind in clusters. Little by little the boat veered around in the green water as the helmsman gritted his teeth, and persevered.

Hugh was so full of the joy of winning that he did not see how Gans Street was taking his recovery. The truth was that Gans Street did not notice it as a whole until the middle of February, and by that time they were slightly disappointed that he should recover. For a month they had all

been gossiping in their parlors about getting a new minister. They had even chosen one—tentatively—a meek, unmarried man whom many mammas were expecting to solve a certain household problem. Some new clothes had already been bought for his benefit. There were some parishioners who dared to raise their heads and say, "Look here—Bloom's as good as ever!"

But these were a snubbable minority.

Gans Street did not realize what their casting away of Hugh would mean to his career in the Conference. They thought of ministers as a type of traveling salesman who could sell his wares as well in one city as another. As long as a minister was not a bishop, they thought he would not care what church he was in. They bore no actual ill will toward Hugh. But they had made up their minds to a new man, and they wanted him, whether Hugh was his own self or not. As more than one member was heard to remark brightly, "Variety is the spice of life." Gans Street was in the position of a child who wants a new toy and finds that the old one has maliciously mended itself.

Hugh thought that his congregation seemed kinder to him now, and he was much encouraged and took heart. But Stella was not deceived.

She knew that last minute heartiness which descends upon a host and hostess just before the company leaves. Also, she had heard hints at sewing bees. She began, quietly, to get the mending all done. Hugh wondered why she was so slow about buying spring clothes for herself and why she was putting little patches and delicate darns in Helen's chambrays and ginghams, just as if they weren't going to have twenty-five hundred next year to spend!

On the evening of April-fool day, two weeks before Conference, a delegation from the Official Board waited upon Hugh. As Stella opened the front door for them she saw the words "painful duty" written upon their foreheads. With head flung high, she ushered them into the parlor and lighted the most uncomfortable lamp, so that they would all have to squint. She also opened a window in the kitchen adjoining that was sure to make a horrid draught.

Then, slightly strengthened by revenge, she scuffed upstairs to tell Hugh. He was sitting at his desk so that she could not see his face. The green student lamp, by his side, diffused a green gloom over the scattered papers, the scratched chairs, and the colored rows of mute, wise books that lined the four walls to the ceil-

ing. It all looked so natural and usual that Stella could hardly believe a murderous delegation was waiting downstairs, with clubs under their jackets. Hugh turned toward her, and she saw that he had the look of one who has been battered down just as he was about to stand. She wondered if that battered look would ever leave him now.

"I know who it is," he said. "Don't bother to say."

Stella did not dare to move, or speak, as he went from the room. It flashed upon her that he looked like John the Baptist must have looked after dwelling in the desert with locusts and wild honey. Or like Jesus when He emerged from the wilderness and the Temptation. In the semi-scared privacy of her soul Stella had often thought that Jesus and Hugh had a great deal in common.

She sat down on the top step of the stairs so that she could hear the proceedings. She found that she was sobbing and that big boiling tears were falling into her lap. She did hope that Hugh would speak out when the time came. At first she heard everyone extremely vociferous and unanimous on the topic that it was going to be a very, very cloudy day to-morrow.

Hugh sat in a pink brocaded armchair, which fortunately avoided the draught and looked steadily at the five men before him. There was Zollig, the butcher; Mumm, the druggist; Droosh, the manufacturer of Guaranteed Glass Eyes; Moses Yudd, and Nutch, who kept the notion store. Hugh's stare seemed to scorch them a little, for they all looked down at their shoes and wiggled. Hugh had always said that he could never give his best to these men, that they could never drink more than the froth of his thinking, and now his fate was cupped in their hands. They were raising their heads presently, and regarding him as if he were a delinquent delivery boy who had mixed the orders.

Mumm was the first to turn the conversation from the weather. With an absorbed expression, as if he were measuring poison, he said, "Brother Bloom—we feel that perhaps the church needs a change."

"A change of weather?" Hugh inquired, rejoicing that the Lord had delivered the abrupt Mumm into his hands, if only for a sentence.

"No—of pastors," Zollig said, with a bloody look at Mumm.

As Zollig spoke, Hugh thought of the time he had sat with Zollig five hours when his wife

died. Zollig had blubbered on his shoulder and said that he would never, never forget his comfort. Zollig had sent Stella very tender meat until he married again. Hugh remembered, too, that he had been with Nutch in the hour when his twins were born—a babbling and exultant Nutch. Hugh had wrestled, also, with the devil in Droosh, when he had been tempted to use a cheap kind of glass in his eyes and reap undue profit. Droosh had come out of the conflict tremulous and humble.

Moses Yudd had brought his Treasurer's account along, as if it were a Domesday Book, and he held it in his lap, so that he could refer to it easily and accurately cast down any flightiness or hope.

Stella listened, on her top step, for a good, strong speech from Hugh. But she heard nothing except courtesy and composure and gentle reserve. Those tactics, she thought, might do for a higher class of enemy, but she yearned to tell a man like Zollig what she thought of him and his lamb chops. The tortoise-shell cat, Dorothy Vernon, climbed into her lap, and Stella stroked her fur roughly, so that Dorothy Vernon growled. Stella did wish that there were some way she could signal Hugh to fight. The cat's

growls gave her an idea. She set kitty on the third step down, and gave her a slight kick on her orange tail. Outraged, Dorothy Vernon surged down the stairs, foamed through the parlor, and threw herself out of the kitchen window.

"Hugh will know I am sitting here and did that," Stella thought. "The cat has never liked me."

But before Hugh could obey the message, Mumm rose to his feet. He was beginning to sneeze from the draught, and the rest were shivery around the ankles. With teeth set, Stella watched Hugh show them out of the front door —restrained to the last syllable. The door was scarcely shut before Stella bounded down the stairs in something of Dorothy Vernon's manner, and she shook her fist under Hugh's nose.

"Oh!" she raged, "Why did you let them run over you like that? Why did you sit there like a jack rabbit?"

"They would have quoted me in every kitchen in Smollett," Hugh pleaded. "And, besides, I couldn't think of anything really effective to say. The most foolish and ordinary and vulgar things came into my head."

Stella pushed him aside, swept the front door open, and darted out into the darkness. She had

no definite idea of what she meant to do, except to make up for Hugh's mildness. The delegation was in front of the drug store, saying good-by to Mumm. Stella stood on the parsonage steps.

"You—you!" she called. She thought she shouted, but she only whispered. Thoughts howled through her head in deafening ululation, none of them articulate. Her tongue rattled in her mouth. Before she could utter anything, a southbound trolley car went by and carried the delegation away on the rear platform.

"Lord God!" Stella said, feebly, letting her arms fall, limp—"Lord God! I'm done with You!"

Hugh took the train for Conference as if it were a tumbril. He knew what to expect. His enemies, in a group headed by Andrews, waited for his arrival at Conference as Joseph's brethren waited for him on the hills of Dothan, and said, one to another, "Behold! this dreamer cometh!"

They had a pit already digged for the dreamer and his coat of many colors.

They put him down into Estey's Corners.

CHAPTER XVII

HUGH had not seen Estey's Corners since he left it, years ago, on the back seat of a creaking surrey—a serious, brown boy, holding in his lap Noah, the duck, who was moving to Genoa with the family.

Late one misty afternoon, three weeks after Annual Conference, and almost a year after Gideon Thurber became bishop, the Estey's Corners station hack slowly hobbled by the white frame Methodist church and the gray churchyard that was so close to the road. As they passed the churchyard, Hugh leaned far out of the hack to see the carved lamb on top of Rebecca's grave. Was it a thousand or two thousand years ago that Rebecca died of measles and mother said that a Baptist doctor could have saved her? Hugh noticed that emerald moss, and little lichen, had grown neatly around the granite wool of her lamb.

Hugh sat in the front seat of the hack, beside the driver, as a barricade for the bags. Stella

and Helen were in the back—Stella rigid as she watched the descending, rounding ribbon of road that was going to the parsonage she had never seen. She was thinking that she could never be as good as Hugh's mother in this church. She really did not want to be so good. Helen bent forward in her seat, snapping against her chin the rubber band of her broad, yellow leghorn hat. Her eyes were fixed on the red, wrinkled neck of the driver.

"Mamma," she whispered, politely, for fear of offending the driver, "I don't like it here. There's no houses or sidewalks."

"Ssssh!" Stella hissed, ferociously. "If you say that so papa can hear, I will take your teddy bear away for two weeks."

Hugh was thinking what ambitions that surrey load of Bloom children had held, once upon a time. Agatha had wanted to be a deaconess, and she was the mother of four children, instead. Dorcas had desired to make funeral wreaths, and she was an incurable clubwoman who was bringing up her one little boy with a great deal of method. Matthew and Mark were still bachelor farmers, but Hugh could remember the time they pined to be architects. Mary and Martha

were the only ones who had realized their full ambition. They had planned to be wives of pillars of the church and give church suppers. And now they were wives in an Episcopalian church with a permanent Parish House Fund which existed on suppers.

The driver, who had moved to Estey's Corners since Daniel's time, and so was, mercifully, not too interested, set the Blooms at the front gate of the parsonage and was off, whistling to his horse, who looked enough like Balaam to be a nephew.

"The hill down to the pump isn't as steep as it used to be," Hugh said, looking all around him. "And I must paint this fence."

The great, black key stood in the front keyhole, and Hugh turned it with unsteady fingers, as if he were entering a haunted house. It seemed to him that he must be little Hugh again, and that Helen must be Agatha beside him in her broad yellow leghorn hat. As the door opened, he half expected a rush of Luke, John, and Peter down the old front hall. There were those same curly pansies on the wall paper.

But there was no storm of boys in the hall. The house was as quiet and strange as memory.

The first thing Hugh saw, in the corner of the sitting room, was the old organ. He knew it was the same organ by the big, burned place Mark had made with a candle. Hugh tiptoed over, lifted the cover, and pressed down one saffron key. But the organ was silent, too, like the rest of the house. Through the tiny back window Hugh saw the white plum tree. It was blossoming—early again.

"I shall plant vegetables in the garden, and nasturtiums around the edge," Hugh said, turning to Stella. She was standing stiffly by the door, as if she did not quite belong.

"I shall put tulips down the front path," Hugh continued, dreamily—"red and yellow tulips."

"I like asters better," Stella said.

"Father was just a little older than I am when he came here," Hugh mused.

"Luther — Burning — the Papal — Bull," Helen read, loudly. She was looking at the steel engraving above the mantelpiece.

"Can you find the Bull?" Hugh asked, anxiously, as if he really wished to know.

"Don't be silly, papa," Helen replied. "There isn't any *real* Bull."

There Hugh stood, in the middle of the sitting room, remembering with all his might. He could not bear to take the bags upstairs — just yet. Then he would know that he had come here to stay and to work—to this place which to Stella's unenchanted eyes must seem old, and broken down, and even dirty. Now, while they were still downstairs, it was almost as if they had been riding by for pleasure and had just stopped in to see and to remember. Hugh would have liked to keep it so.

"You ought to get a Paisley shawl, Stella," he said, at last.

"Never!" she said, passionately.

There was a clumsy silence.

Then Hugh hoisted his old, bright colors, unaware that a defeated ship should keep them down.

"It's strange," he said, gallantly, with his left hand on the lapel of his coat—"it's strange how God answers our prayers—differently. You know we always wanted to buy a place in the country. Now here we have one, without spending a penny. And maybe, I can sit under that sycamore out there and write poetry."

Then Stella thought something which she would never say aloud.

"Yes," Stella thought, "here Hugh is now, with his plum tree and his tulips. But where will they send us—next Conference time? . . ."

And they went straight upstairs with the bags.

THE END